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UNDER THE BELLS

A ROMANCE

BY

LEONARD KIP

AUTHOR OF "ÆNONE," "THE DEAD MARQUISE," ETC.

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I DEDICATE THIS VOLUME

AFFECTIONATELY TO

MY WIFE:

FOR WHOSE GENEROUS APPROVAL IT WAS WRITTEN

AND WITH WHOSE EARNEST AID PREPARED.

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UNDER THE BELLS.

CHAPTER I.

A LITTLE over three centuries ago, and during the rule of a certain king of France,—further than which it need not that we should definitely speak, seeing that this king is nothing in our story, and that his reign but little differs from other reigns before and after, in amount of war and carnage, base treason and torture, and almost universal misery,—during that rule, we say, there stood in the centre of an ancient city of Guienne, a gray stone church.

To this, the cathedral-church of Sainte-Clotilde, one Pere Rouflet was attached as priest. For many years he had been treated with neglect, and been often openly made to suffer slights, and, not seldom, ridicule. For it happened that he was small in stature and weak of frame ; the partial distortion of his figure bearing so closely upon the line that separates deformity from ordinary grace of manhood, that for a while,—though be it said, he knew it not,—there had been serious question whether it was proper that he should be made a priest at all. Nor

when at last admitted within the order, was he esteemed of especial worthiness; inasmuch as his feebleness of voice rendered him unfit for public oratory, even if his natural timorousness had not of itself been sufficient to deter him. Whereby, in the end it came about, that his duties grew to be circumscribed within mere supernumerary attendance at the altar, and occasional confession of those few persons, who imagined that penances might be less strictly ordered by one so humble and retiring in manner, than by more rugged, overbearing, and fullspoken priests. Neither, for a while, did his devotion to the practice of his chosen art assist him into better favor and consideration; for though he adorned the cathedral walls with many paintings by his own hand, it was not unnaturally supposed that actual beauty of design could scarcely emanate from one so timorous and uncouth, and his labors were tolerated as the harmless amusement of wasted hours rather than recognized as a substantial benefit to the church.

But it came to pass, one day, that the great Leonardo da Vinci, in his journeying through France, visited the cathedral; and standing for many minutes in wrapped and spellbound contemplation before the picture of Sainte-Clotilde, he pronounced it worthy of lasting fame, and wished aloud that the artist had not been brought up a priest, since, under some other condition of life, he might have been able to give more study to the divine art, and in the end, mayhap, have become the equal of many

painters of acknowledged distinction. With that, the sympathetic tide of friendly recognition began at once to swell bountifully in Pere Rouflet's favor. His associate priests, no longer treating him with neglect, as they had perhaps unwittingly done, failed not henceforth to sound his praises as one who had reflected exceeding honor upon their order. Even the Bishop recognized his talent, with a gracious smile, and observed that it was possible to praise the Lord as reverently with brush and pencil as with canticle and prayer. Perhaps, thereby, the Bishop, being naturally a man of few words, which yet were often spoken to the point, was not averse to administer gentle reproof of some who prided themselves too greatly upon their capacity for loud-mouthed song, and, in its rotund exercise, too often threatened to drown his own more gentle tones. Let that matter as it may, it is certain that, as most commonly happens, the hidden sarcasm was not at all perceived, and the Bishop's pleasant words were taken as redounding only to the glory of Pere Rouflet. With such effect, indeed, that from this time the others no longer spoke of him as Poor Pere Rouflet, but rather as Rouflet the artist-priest. And for his allotted studio, the want of which he had hitherto most severely felt, a vacant room was set off in the cathedral itself adjoining the sacristy ; it being understood that thenceforth his only duty would be to bestow new glory upon the church by the continued exercise of that peculiar talent which God had given him.

It was a small and contracted space thus portioned off to

him, indeed, yet all sufficient for his purpose. Flanked by one tall narrow window, set with thick stained glass and crowded with heavy stone mullions, so that at times the sunlight appeared to struggle in with difficulty ; a nook which never, at the best, could bask in that full glare and radiance of sunshine to which other artists everywhere aspired, deeming it necessary for the perfection of their work ; yet, in reality, bright enough for all his allotted labor, so much more suitably did it affect him than the old dreary end of monastery-hall, where, painfully and on sufferance, he had previously carried out his tasks. Furnished with a chair or two,—an easel drawn close against the window,—a table for his paints and pallet,—and with a small prie-Dieu in the further corner ; these were all the visible appliances of his art. The prie-Dieu not less than the others, indeed; since constantly when he felt his inventive power failing, and his enthusiasm growing faint, he would there kneel and ask for saintly assistance ; often, after the credulous fashion of the period, imagining that in his restored self-assurance and renewed energy of conception, his prayer had been answered by heavenly intervention. There were other times, however, when, with more abundant command of reason, he would become convinced that his temporary failure came only from weariness of the flesh, through toil too long continued. Then Pere Rouflet would leave his little studio for change of scene and occupation,—going not far, however, so reluctant was he to abandon altogether the neighborhood of his

artistic labor,—passing merely through a low doorway into the main body of the building,—there pacing hour after hour over the marble pavement, and treading the course of the long narrow aisles as in former times he had trodden the dull monastery hall and cloisters,—feeling, indeed, a kind of ghostly companionship in every seam and stain of the old cathedral.

Old, indeed, let it here be said; since even in those long-past days the church of Sainte-Clotilde was accounted venerable. Not, indeed, with that advance of gathered centuries which tells an unpleasing story of decrepitude and decay, but rather with that stately progression which, in every line and seam and wrinkle cut by corroding time, while losing meanwhile no cherished attribute of former strength and beauty, ever assumes a newer and more graceful dignity of majesty and repose. All this could be plainly noted in the rough, gray walls; which, though time-stained and weather-beaten, still stood as firm and impregnable as at their first pious founding. In the hidden nooks and crannies, where, preventing hands not readily reaching up, tangles of long wanton weeds and close-knit mosses had taken up their lodgment, and striven to strike their thin roots inward, and thereby assist the slow ravages of time; yet all the while had proved themselves so feeble in their efforts as merely to impart a new and picturesque fringing to the prevailing symmetry and strength. In the whole length of the square towers; where ran from top to bottom a jagged rent; which at the worst, however,

showed only as a faint and almost indecipherable line, that during long centuries to come might not spread open more distinctly to the view. In the broken line of clerestory roof ; whence two or three of the flying buttresses had fallen, leaving without seeming support their connecting pinnacles, which still, however, held themselves independently aloft in no acknowledgment of inquiet or tottering condition. In the intricate carvings and quaint gargoyles and corbel-heads; which had begun to moulder away at either side, though in others that remained more nearly intact there was still visible a rich and abiding beauty of mingled grace and strength. Throughout the whole broad expanse of walls and roof and tower, indeed ; where was now, perhaps, no perfectly clear-cut edge or corner left, since everywhere the tooth of time and the violence of siege as well, had eaten or brushed away much of the finer workmanship of the builders' art, and had left only roughened and rounded surfaces ; yet where, for all that, there was such rich appearance of sturdy, unbroken and immovable dignity of repose and strength, that none who looked up could fail to realize for a certainty that many generations must still pass away before the church should succumb to actual ruin.

An old age, firm and vigorous outside, and marked with strength and durability even more plainly within, where naturally there should be fewer evidences of decay ; since there the violence of tempests could not assail, nor had the reckless passion of warfare chanced to penetrate.

And yet, even within the church, there were to be detected a few well-marked traces of the gathered centuries. Not, indeed, in the glittering altars; which, under careful supervision and repair, still shone as bright and resplendant as when unveiled before their earliest crowds of worshippers. Nor in the carved screens and confessionals, models of mediæval beauty. Nor in the broad tessellated pavement; which, though now worn smooth by the tread of myriads of feet, was still as perfect as ever in its design and continuity. Nor yet in the pictured glass; which, as bright and unfaded as when first lifted into place, let the softened light steal freely through, to chase away with richly-blended colors the opposing shadows. In such respects, when seen within, the church seemed likely to hold its head proudly aloft for many an age to come. Yet even there, the faint, moist breath of time had left its subtle impress; developed here in the quiet and picturesque darkening of the chiselled stone,—there in an almost indistinguishable mouldering away of the more sharpened corners of the shapely sculpturings,—everywhere, indeed, in scarcely perceptible stains, gaining ground by only a hair-breadth every few years, yet none the less in the end destined to prevail.

Therefore it was that the church of Sainte-Clotilde, though still well-built and sturdy, might already be considered old. And it might also be, that it was this very aspect of venerable stolidity which caused it to array

itself in harmony with the artist-priest, and to steal upon his affections with such subtle manifestations of ghostly companionship. For, though he might not openly be conscious of the fact, there seemed in the church's outer aspect to exist some strange and weird likeness to himself ; he being in appearance so worn and weary—so different from the bustling world outside, and yet, with all the burthen of his bodily imperfections weighing upon him, not ill-content to look forward to many more years of earnest work and duty. Certain it was, that a newer and grander building, with every seam and corner well and accurately defined and its walls shining with bright, unspotted freshness could not have been thus responsive to his heart. Rather would his abashed nature have fled affrighted from any mystic contact with it. Here, however, all seemed woven into his soul,—an attribute of himself. For hours, therefore, he would wander up and down the long aisles, marking every stain or light fracture as though it were an old friend, and childishly imagining that, from day to day, he could note an advance of decrepitude that, in reality, only centuries could develop,—brushing the dust from antique carved tombs,—reading anew their inscriptions as though they were written for his inspection, and spoke to him alone,—and far better and oftener than all else, standing for long periods in wrapt and earnest contemplation of his own paintings, which hung here and there around the walls. With some element of self-admiration, possibly, when he

felt that in any delineation of form or expression he had achieved success ; yet withal, shrinking from open acknowledgment or perception of such elation, as though it were a sin. Striving to think that, in the matter of this attention to his own good work, he was merely studying it with reference to future avoidance of its faults ; yet ever and anon glancing guiltily over his shoulder, lest others in the cathedral, chancing to stroll near, might observe him in his self-absorption, and impute to him more sin of vanity than should be really due.

Yet at most times there was little danger of such interruption. It happened that even in that long-past century, the church had already somewhat fallen from its grand estate, and had come at last to have little need at all of long drawn out aisles and rare and broad transepts. There had come the time when other edifices of superior attraction stood rivals to it, and enticed away the Court and nobles, and much of that attendant crowd of wealth and station which once had not disdained to honor the old church with their formal worship. Gradually, too, the centre of city affluence had crept away into other directions ; and with slow timorous approach, the closely crowded abodes of artisan and student, and the barracks of archer and musqueteer had stolen forward in their stead, and had begun to press rudely around the building. Upon the coming of such ignoble throng, more and more did the former brilliant congregations fall away, until there remained only a plebian and scattered

attendance. Now and again, upon some great occasion calling forth the might of olden association, there would be chance renewal of the former glories ; but, for the most part, there was merely dull neglect and apathy. At matins and vespers, indeed, a handful of the faithful might be present ; but at other times there was most generally dead silence and desertion. Possibly a market woman with her basket at her side, kneeling halfway up the aisle ;—or holy devotee prostrated upon the pavement near the high altar ;—or guardsman standing shame-facedly near the door, leaning upon his halbert, while, with some superstitious feeling that an act of prayer might bring fortune during his projected raid in the train of noted Free Lances, he repeated an ave. These or such as these would generally be all. And even these, standing or kneeling in the broad nave, would be little likely to take note of the small bent figure of the Priest, facing the narrow intricacies of the side aisles ; even though he stopped and stood for hours, absorbed with admiration, before his own works of art.

CHAPTER II.

THERE came anon, as often before, one of those days wherein Pere Rouflet felt his mind uneasy and his conceptions deadened, so that he failed to labor at his art with due success. It was a bright and pleasant morning; and with less than the accustomed difficulty the glowing sunshine crept through the heavy mullions of the window and brightened the studio with abounding cheerfulness. One sparkling ruddy ray fell aslant the little easel, and spread broadly across the canvas, bringing out into new brilliancy the colors already laid. The picture showed design for head of Saint Jerome ;—the face sketched out, the flesh tints partially given, and the flowing gray beard half completed. So far the Priest had labored with satisfying effect, but now he seemed all at once hindered from any further progress. In vain he kneeled at the prie-Dieu, and besought the aid of St. Jerome himself in creation of the prototype ; no heavenly assistance came to bring back the capacity for toil or restore the scattered inspiration. Then, seeing what he should have known before, that his want of force had come from weariness of

the flesh and from too long continued absorption of the mind, Pere Rouflet passed through the little door, and stood in the main body of the church.

There, after his wont in such emergencies, he paced for a few minutes up and down the aisles, caring for no other sphere of exercise or any different distraction of his thoughts. Strolled listlessly here and there, for the thousandth time reading the obscure inscriptions on the monuments, brushing away the dust from the stone carvings, and stealthily pausing now and then before his completed pictures. Now before his Martyrdom of St. Eustace; only to find his accustomed admiration of its beauty deadened by the torpor of his mind, so that in place of excellence he now saw only distortion and false coloring. Then before the Entombment; where now, and seemingly for the first time, he detected cruel errors of light and shade. With that he sighed deeply; being not wont, indeed, to find himself thus disappointed in his favorites. There was one relief, however, that never yet had failed him. and for this he sought. Gazing timorously along the whole body of the church, with that strange diffidence which made him so greatly dread the observation of other men, and now seeing, to his great satisfaction, that there was no one present to disturb him—not even pious devotee or rough man-at-arms, he left the shadowed shelter of the aisle, and came forward into the clear exposure of the brighter nave. Thence advancing to the region of the choir, he paused and fastened his eyes with eager, satisfy-

ing gaze upon one full-length majestic figure, set in the centre of the large stained window over and behind the high altar. This was his great picture of Sainte-Clotilde, —the creation that had made his artistic fame.

The great Leonardo da Vinci had not been at fault in looking upon the Sainte-Clotilde as the most glorious of all Pere Rouflet's works. Compared with that, his Martyrdom of Saint Eustace and his Entombment were of little worth. Those were commonplace efforts of the fancy; developed with care, indeed, and studiously accurate in posture, anatomy and coloring, but wanting in that inner depth of soul which seldom results from any other labor than that which is directed by passionate absorption. But upon the Sainte-Clotilde the Priest had lavished not merely the ordinary resources of his art. He had thrown out his whole heart upon the work, giving to its prosecution a wild devouring enthusiasm, that could know no rest until every aspiration of his being had been more than satisfied,—letting his full nature glow unrestrained with tender sentiment,—painting from the recollection of an absent face, but with such lively consciousness of it, indeed, that it was as though the face was placed in living beauty before him,—making every line and shadow instinct with well-conceived expression,—combining faithful tenderness for the earthly friend with devout adoration of the beatified saint. So that, at the last, as the natural result, the painting could scarcely fail to grow into beau-

teous form, replete with almost every noble impress of both human and celestial attributes.

Unlike his other works, all of which adorned the body of the church, this painting was not executed upon canvas, but upon one large pane of glass set in the centre of the great stained window of the apse. At night, of course, the picture could not be seen, except as an illegible stain ; and even in the afternoon there were times when, beneath the influence of a passing outward gloom, the colors seemed faint and lifeless. But in the morning, if the sun was clear, the whole work would glow with unrivalled brilliancy ; every minute shade of outline and costume coming out unbroken and distinct,—every tender expression of the countenance developing itself into sublimity and beauty.

As in the other and similar works, it followed one common fashion of design ; exhibiting itself as a stately form in purple, crimson and gold, standing upon folds of fleecy clouds that circled upwards from the feet and around the head, a shining aureola of celestial glory. It was the face alone, that, for the intensity of its beauty and sweetness had made the work a masterpiece ; and in that particular the painter had achieved success only from the fact that he had not needed to invent a face or to copy old established precedents, but that for his guidance he had had a living model before his mind. From this fact also, it resulted that, apart from mere grace and loveliness of feature and expression, there was a character that stamped

the face with a peculiar beauty of individuality. There were few who could understandingly look upon it, without perceiving that it must have had its living representative. Leonardo himself, at a rough glance had detected this circumstance in the picture's origin ; and while praising the work, had lauded also the judgment with which the artist must have selected the model. And in the congregation of those few who came there to worship, it was well known who that model had been ; in consideration of which, among nearly all, the painting was for that the more abundantly approved, as helping to keep fresh and holy the recollection of one whom each had learned to love for her devotion and deeds of charity. In the faith and practice of that approval, the Priest now held himself most steadfast of them all ; and, while stealing frequent opportunity to gaze with the pride of a successful artist upon his work, he never failed to mingle with it his loving appreciation of one who had been the only friend of a desolate and secluded life.

Thus upon that especial morning, gazing upwards in contemplative mood, and noting with pleasure how every line and feature of the painting shone brightly in its full transparent blaze of sunlit glory, Pere Rouflet heard behind him the light footfall of soft sandal, mingled with the solid tread of martial boot. Almost before he could turn, in wonderment that so easily his presence could thus have been stolen upon, and what he deemed his infatuation of worldly pride made manifest, there broke upon his

hearing the deep tones of manhood mingled with the soft voice of woman, falling pleasantly upon his ears in familiar converse. And when he looked around, he saw that three persons in courtly attire stood behind him. First to be noted was a tall and wondrously handsome man,—clad in richly embroidered velvet surcoat with cunningly slashed sleeves and lace adornments,—with ornamented sword dangling at his side, boots of Cordovan leather marked with golden ensigns of knighthood upon his feet, and plumed cap held reverently in the hand. Beside him stood a fair young girl,—with attire of similar richness, and equally suggestive of high rank and birth; and added to it all, such lovely kindly face, that it seemed as though no human ingenuity in the matter of adornment could properly reach up to the measure of her sweet young soul. Near the two, though at the moment a little behind them both, loitered a stripling page of the Royal Household; decked with plumed cap and jewelled hilted dagger, and with pleasant and ingenuous expression, and likeness somewhat suggestive of the lady.

"Truly a wonderful painting of a most lovely face," said the young girl to her companion. Then, turning to Pere Rouflet—"And tell me—who has had good fortune to be the artist?"

"Myself, fair lady."

"Yourself?"

"Even so, lady. The great Leonardo da Vinci has

seen fit to praise my feeble essays," he said, in sudden and even as it seemed to himself, unaccustomed garrulity of well satisfied pride ; "and therefore, by consent and approbation of Holy Church, to me has been left the duty of adorning this cathedral."

"And whom, Priest,—to ask further yet—does the figure represent?" demanded the Knight, speaking with impetuous tone, and as it would seem, with little knowledge of the true form of ecclesiastical address. He had been standing for the past moment in spirit of silent gloom, gazing up at the painting with something of a look of startled inquiry rather than of the admiration manifested by his companion,—a frown as of puzzling thought wrinkling his brow,—nervously, the while, biting an end of his curling moustaches. "And how—"

"It is Sainte-Clotilde, Sir Knight."

"Pardie! Do I not know and see that well enough for myself, indeed? Yet who was the fair original of the picture? For well I can perceive that there must have been some one who lent her sweet face to the work ; since I take it that even the most gifted artists do not from the shallowness of their own crude, unaided fancies, elaborate such exceeding beauty of expression."

"It is the face of a young girl who came among us from a distance, nearly two years ago," Pere Rouflet rejoined ; speaking with hesitation, inasmuch as he doubted whether he should reply freely about the matter at all, much less bestow confidence upon such utter strangers. Yet, on the

other hand, why should he make scruple in telling that which so many others knew as well? "She was constant with us in goodly work among the sick and poor, and for her kindliness of heart and sympathetic charity was beloved by all who knew her. Whereby, in the end, she did not cease, until she had more solemnly devoted her labors to God's service."

"And her name?"

"She—she was called Manon. More than that I must not tell."

"I understand," the Knight responded, with something of unwitting gruffness of accent. "The secret of the Church—the seal of the confessional, is it not? She was called Manon, yet had another name which could not be told, inasmuch as it might too readily reveal past history which rather should be forever hidden from the knowledge of the world. That is it, may I not understand?—Well, Priest, remain at ease. I for one will not try to pry into your store of mysteries.—Have you now looked long enough, Cecile? Then will we move onward."

With that, the three passed slowly along towards the further end of the cathedral,—the Knight still frowning perplexedly, and again biting the twisted ends of his long moustaches, his fair companion seemingly filled with wonderment at his sudden outbreak of curiosity. But when, with the page at her side, she moved a pace or two in advance, the Knight fell for a moment yet further behind,

and nervously arresting Pere Rouflet by the arm, exclaimed in lowered tone :

"You spoke, Priest, somewhat as though all this was in the past. Is she—is she then dead ?"

Pere Rouflet for a moment hesitating, remained silent ; gazing downward at his feet, then looking up at the Knight's face, as if there to search out, as in some mirror, the reason for the question. Something he there saw, indeed, that perhaps he did not like ; and, with a tone of tremor in his voice, he answered :

"Were I to say that she is dead, Sir Knight,—falling asleep by the mercy of God and in the faith of—"

"Enough ! Enough !—And what matters the faith ?" the Knight muttered to himself ; and in those few hushed tones, it seemed to the Priest that he could detect an agitated quaver. "So long as she is dead, how can it concern—" Then the speaker's voice sank so much lower yet, that no more could be distinctly heard, and he moved onward, the scowl upon his face seeming to deepen as he went. A moment longer, and he had rejoined his companions and the three were lending their attention to some other object of interest,—the carving of one of the transcept altars or the quaint inscriptions upon memorial tablets. Pere Rouflet remained alone, still gazing up at his masterpiece,—wondering a little at the nature of the late conversation, and again somewhat disturbed in mind with an impression that, despite all his caution, he might have spoken out too freely.

But while he there stood, wrapped in his perplexing doubts and speculations, again there came behind him the soft fall of slippered foot, this time unmingled with tread of rude military boot, and she whom the Knight had called Cecile once more stood near. She had stolen away from the Knight, leaving him gazing moodily at some blackened stone effigy ; and now, with winsome, pleading grace, and attitude as of one descending to personal appeal, she laid her soft gloved hand lightly upon Pere Rouflet's arm.

"Did I hear aright," she said, "that you are the painter of that glorious picture ?"

"Even so," he replied.

"And will you paint my picture, also ?—Not as holy saint, for church adornment," she added, with a smile "but smaller, so as to be carried upon the heart,—for the loving heart of the Knight yonder, to whom I am affianced."

Pere Rouflet started ; as well, indeed, he might. Such application as that, had never before been made to him by any one. And ought he ever to think of becoming an ordinary artist of the world, and carrying his talents outside the pale of Holy Church ?

"Do not say nay, until you have heard me," she added, nervously plucking at his sleeve. "We have been long betrothed and I have for many months desired to make him this gift. Other artists have I considered ; but he has spoken in captious criticism of each, upon my mere mention of the name, and therefore I can

have none of them. Repeating these names to him as though by chance, indeed; seeing that I would not have him suspect the nature of the gift that I intended for him. Rather should it come to him as a joyful and pleasant surprise. And now—"

"Now, you say?"

"Now, for the first time, have I found an artist of whom I know he will approve,—yourself, indeed. Did you not mark how admiringly his gaze was fastened upon that painting, even as though it were a precious delight to his soul,—how eagerly he seemed to drink in every sweet expression and proportion? Seeing that, I know he will be pleased with your work, though he has never been with that of any other. Grant me, therefore, this one request. There will be time for it all, and no weariness or dissatisfaction shall come to you, from my ever proving too critical or exacting."

How could Pere Rouflet resist those pleadings,—those soft utterances of her heartfelt wish? But yet he knew that he must do so.

"It is a request made, alas! in vain," he said, slowly shaking his head. "To the church alone owe I all my duty and constant service. Were I to stray away from my labor in her behalf—"

"And yet, why need you at all depart from that?" she interrupted. "Or how, indeed, should neglect thereby ensue to Holy Church? May not the pencil be employed in her adornment as well herein, as though the colors were laid di-

rectly upon pane or panel? For it is the church itself that would have recompense for the task. To yourself I would dare offer nothing; but to the church, whatever it may ask. Looking around, even now I see clearly wherein I may prove of benefit to her. I gaze upon carved altar and gilded shrine,—upon elaborate rood-screen and sedilia;—but alas! how poor in comparison with all else are those little candlesticks! Surely the church should have better adornments than such as these.—And now, for that little picture of myself, I will give to the church, two tall silver candlesticks of such beauty, richness and solidity as perhaps have seldom hitherto been seen."

At hearing this, the breath of Pere Rouflet seemed almost to forsake him, so thoroughly did her proposition meet the suggestions and longings of his own heart. Yes,—there lay the sole deficiency in the altar furniture of Sainte-Clotilde,—the beauty and completeness of tall silver candlesticks. Her observant eyes had detected the omission, and now it lay in his power to have it remedied. There had been a time, indeed, when that defect had not existed. Ten years before, the high altar had had its candlesticks of solid silver, tall and shapely, and of the richest Florentine workmanship. But civil war had once more broken out, as so often before, and it had become needful that these treasures should be concealed. Pere Ambrose, the oldest of all the Priests, had taken that duty upon himself: burying the candlesticks, as was supposed, but telling no one where, lest some marauders of either

warlike faction might with cruel torture wrest the secret from even the most faithful breast. The dangers of the civil war had passed away; but by the time that fact had been definitely realized,Pere Ambrose had died of sudden, sharp illness, and the secret of the place of the treasure's deposit had died with him. In vain had the ground of crypt, cloister and courtyard been thoroughly dug over and searched; recovery of the candlesticks was no more possible than if the threatened marauders had actually seized and melted them. Since then, the church had languished in the meek forlorn poverty of small bronze substitutes; waiting, meanwhile, the pious impulse of some faithful worshipper to replace the glory of its former days.—And lo! here at last there was free and generous offer of the gift, and himself selected to be the happy medium of its realization. Why, indeed, should he not give his talents scope outside the pale of the Church for such a happy consummation, seeing that all the benefit of his labors would be so worthily applied within? And why would not the new gift be practically the fruit of his toil, as much as though with his own hands he had carved the standards from the solid metal?

"I cannot refuse the gift nor deny any labor of mine that can procure it," therefore he said, after a moment of almost overwhelming emotion. "To you, fair lady, be the glory of it; to myself merely the portion of an humble instrument in properly promoting the holy purpose. And how, then, shall we begin?"

"Each day, or as often as to you may seem proper. I can come here as though for worship," she responded. "Once here, it will be for yourself to say where and how we must meet."

"Yes,—and once here, my daughter, the rest will be very easy. See yonder confessional and take note of the little door beside it. That little door leads to a room given up to me for the practice of my art,—a room adjoining the sacristy. No one may enter there except myself. Coming to the front of the confessional, a single step further will lead you into the room. Even should you be seen entering, who would venture to think amiss of it?"

"Who, indeed?" she answered, thinking of him only as a man of sacred office, about whose reputation there could be no evil imputation, and not regarding the half-checked sigh with which the Priest gazed down upon his misshapen figure,—saddening himself with the certainty that even upon worldly grounds, no one would ever think of connecting another person with him in reproach. "To-morrow then, at noon, will I be here, and we will begin the work."

With that she lightly tripped away and rejoined the Knight and page; and after a little longer idle strolling about the building, looking listlessly upon this or that object of art or veneration, and probably with the minds of neither of them well fixed upon what they saw, they reached the broad porch again, and vanished from sight.

CHAPTER III.

THEREFORE the next morning about the hour of noon, the fair Cecile tripped lightly into the nave of the church, attended by a single waiting-maid. There chanced to be no one within, not even any of the cathedral's usual devotees; and there was little occasion, therefore, for pretence of entering the confessional. Passing quickly across the church, and leaving the attendant to amuse herself outside, Cecile rapped gently at the Priest's studio and softly entered.

She found Pere Rouflet sitting absorbed before his easel. The idleness of the previous day and probably his superadded prayers to Saint Jerome for assistance, had inflamed his mind with devout imaginings, and had so greatly restored his capacity for artistic labor that the whole morning had been attended with more than ordinary success. New and continually improved expressions had been gathered upon the face of the pictured saint, almost at mere touch of brush,—light and shade had fallen into their proper places seemingly by mere volition of the artist, so triumphantly did he progress. Perhaps,

for the moment. he had almost forgotten his appointment of the day before, through his interest in the work already at his hand. But when the door slowly opened and he beheld his visitor, he arose and welcomed her with gentle courtesy.

"Hoping," he added, "that you will not find my little studio too rude and tame to attract and interest you. Seeing that it must be so unlike any others that you have visited."

For he noted at the first, the uncertain and inquiring glance which she cast around her, letting her eyes pass in rapid review from groined ceiling and bare walls past the long narrow heavily mullioned window down to the cold stone floor ; and he thought that perhaps she might find in the place a forbidding cheerlessness. She who at the Court must have been so accustomed to what was bright and richly decorated, and, after the poor manner of the day, luxurious! At his words she perceived his thought, chased the semblance of shadow from her face and smilingly seated herself with grace and ease, as though in her own home.

"Different, perhaps, from other studios that I may have seen," she responded, "though not unpleasingly or inaptly so. To each place must be its own attributes, most surely ; and no one would expect to discover here the bedecking and paraphernalia belonging to an artist of the outside world. Few studios have I seen, indeed.—it may be said, none other of late than that of the Painter of the Royal Court."

"And that?" said Pere Rouflet, a little curious, possibly, to learn how other artists fared.

"It was last month, that being at Paris, I went thither, to persuade him to design a mythological group for a tapestry I am working. For such, you will know, are the serious occupations of us maids of honor. And I found the studio large—three times as large as this, it may be,—hung on every wall with tapestries such as I might not dream of equalling with these poor hands,—here and there a bright, glowing painting,—cushioned seats,—arms belonging to a past age,—broad sculptured vases,—costumes of Eastern fashion,—all things collected there, it seems to me, that might be useful as accessory in the painter's art or that could tempt him into inspiration. While here, —I do not mislike the difference, indeed,—here—"

"Here there are merely bare walls and few appliances of art, you would say? But that is partly because those other accessories are not requisite. He needs not forced inspirations, whose dreams are filled only with the figures of the holy saints, looking lovingly and approvingly down upon him, as though to tempt a trial of the limner's art in their behalf. Nor does he need stores of old time or other-clime costumes, whose works require only flowing robes, proper alike for apostle and prophet on earth, or ransomed saint in heaven."

With that, feeling that he need explain himself no further, Pere Rouflet began his preparation for the picture. He moved the easel with the St. Jerome carefully and lov-

ingly one side, and drew the little table in front of him. Then, taking from the drawer a small, properly prepared square of vellum, he bade the fair Cecile sit where the light might most properly fall upon her and give necessary shade to her features; and so began his task.

Then, for the first time, he was able to take careful note of her full loveliness. And as he made that needful beginning of artistic contemplation, it seemed as though before that time he had nowhere seen her equal,—she was so dazzling and unapproachable in the exceeding blaze and power of her beauty. No other such softened and perfected tints,—no other such clustering wreaths of golden locks thickly shadowing forehead and cheeks, to be found in all the world. Eyes so bright and sparkling,—teeth so small and pearl-like,—each feature so properly in accord with every other, giving to the entire face a perfection of symmetry and proportion,—such a soul-lit expression of sweetness and vivacity enhancing the whole,—where else might her equal or her prototype be found?

But why enter into idle speculations as to whether the like of that beauty might anywhere else exist, or as to what others might think about this? All that could serve for nothing in the present. To him there was now the one task of reproducing that sweet face with as much of its abounding flush of beauty and vivacity as human art could compass. In the beginning, this could involve no great labor; and whatever skill might now be required consisted mainly in the due preparation for future artistic

work, seeing that his task for the present lay altogether with form and feature. These must be sketched out on the vellum and accurately shadowed, before there should be any thought about expression or tint. Those latter qualities were matters to be considered nearer to the end; at present there was the duty of simple mechanical reproduction of outline and position. Therefore, withdrawing his mind from extraneous thought and reserving for the future his more earnest and painstaking study, Pere Rouflet sat for an hour leisurely sketching out here and there a line; only, that he might the better give the outline its necessary life, wondering, the while, how best he might encourage her into conversation with him, so as to banish any tendency to constrained attitude or expression.

For a while, in vain. The minutes flew onward and his brush stole silently along the vellum; and even as silently sat the young girl. Hardly did she seem a living being at all, but rather some picturesque ideal of herself; continuing thus motionless and absorbed, her beauteous face displayed in bright relief against her chair's tall, carved back, and her golden hair falling around her shoulders in thick careless mass,—sitting thus speechless, with eyes fixed in forgetful revery upon the artist,—like his own studio, so different from anything she had ever seen before. It was even as a dream to her, indeed. The strange cold forbidding aspect of the room itself had not yet become natural or familiar to her, philosophize as she might about its appropriateness to its purpose;—how

then could she reconcile herself all at once to the artist himself ?

Certainly he was not like any one whom she had seen before, even as his place was different. Nothing about him, indeed, suggestive of the gay cavalier appearance of other and more famous painters, who, with suits of Genoese velvet and plumed caps and rich laces and ornamented swords, were wont, in manner and costume to ape, by favor and patronage of the King, the nobility of the Court. Nothing in him of that air of reckless audacity and spendthrift volatility that commended the Court painter to the admiration of the maids of honor, and bade them consent to intimacies that could amuse for the moment and need not compromise or harm. Nothing, indeed, in him recalling such traits as these. Merely a small, pale man ; in well worn dark cloth without decoration, or even what might be called symmetry or design, so clumsily was it shapen, so harshly stained and patched. A figure not distorted into grotesque deformity, indeed, but still with certain rude, angular, unpleasing outlines ; one shoulder raised above the other, and in every limb a look as though the mere life of the body was all that might be required, and any superior traits indicative of physical manliness should not be given a thought. An earnest and not uninteresting face, it might be ; but roughly modelled in feature, full of anxious and careworn expressions, and stamped beyond its years with an appearance of age to which the carelessly fashioned tonsure gave unnatural addition.

Surely, after all, in coming to him for beauty of art she must have made a mistake, having spoken, most likely, too eagerly and hastily from the impulse of her thoughts; and it was scarcely possible that this small uncouth priest could pretend to vie in artistic excellence with other artists already well renowned. Great, indeed, would be the ridicule at Court, if it should chance that her adventure were ever to be known and her portrait produced from such a limner, replete with hideous distortions.

"I read your thought,—or at least, I partly read it," said Pere Rouflet, of a sudden pausing and looking her full in the face. "It may be that, after all, you feel distrust of my ability,—though whether I read aright in this I cannot say. But that you wonder how, being Priest of Holy Church, I have learned to add my decoration of its altar to my service before it,—that, indeed—"

"Of that, indeed, I wondered," she responded, carefully disregarding his first correct supposition. "Though why such a thing should not be, or why it might not oftener be, seeing that the love of Church might so easily lead to faithful regard for its proper embellishment—"

"This, then, I will tell you; and how it has all come about," Pere Rouflet responded, interrupting her. And folding his arms upon the table before him, so that he might better speak at ease, he began.

"You may not know, how universally ambition rules the soul,—how earnestly the heart of man will often crave the approbation of fellow man. I speak not alto-

gether of that mad ambition known at Court, where it is sought to gain distinction by leading armies to slaughter other armies with success. But everywhere and to every man, even in the lower ranks of life, there is the wish to be regarded as more than a mere unit in a mass,—to be looked up to as superior to other men around him in some quality or qualification. I speak thus in preamble, that it may not seem strange to you that even poor Pere Rouflet has his ambitions."

"And is it not right that it should be so?" Cecil responded.

"It is right, indeed; though possibly the desire should not glow too warmly, since thereby it might lead to the mere madness of ambition, inciting to aims that work only evil to mankind. That, indeed, was not my inclination. How could it be, in one born as humbly as myself, and with such small and ignoble physical power? Well, let that pass. I will only say that, being of low degree and, if the truth must be told, of no known parentage, it was not to be supposed that under ordinary circumstances I should have been reserved for anything other than to grow up in ignorance, and in the end, to help fill up the wasted armies of the King. From that, however, my poor weakness of misshapen frame saved me; compelling me, as I grew up, to choose the solitary life of garret corner, with books for my companions, rather than the rough play of the streets. And so, advancing more and more in love for learning, there came the time when I entered the

Church as acolyte—then rose in my ambition until at last a place in the priesthood fulfilled the longing of my heart."

"That, surely, was a worthy ambition, Pere Rouflet?"

"True; but like most ambitions, disappointing when attained. For when I looked for pleasant intercourse and companionship with my associate priests, I felt myself somewhere always rebuffed. Not with rude words or action, indeed; but with the silent manner or the cautious and reserved intonation that debars freedom of speech and keeps intimacy at a distance. How, after all, should I—the waif upon the streets, the child of poverty—be entitled to association with those who owed their position to high influence, who had received their sacerdotal education from the schools of Rome itself, who found in their vocation nothing which should forbid their mingling in the society of the Court, who held their places about the altar as mere stepping stones to bishoprics and cardinalates? Therefore it happened that I felt myself still thrust aloof from other men,—as lonely amid the throng of priests within the choir as when poring over tattered scrolls in darkened garret."

"And then? Surely there must have been some relief from that?"

"At first, indeed, I could see none. I had made the only career that fate had allowed me to mark out,—I knew that therein, with my need of influence and my lack of physical power, there could be no promotion,—I learned almost to despair. Could I but rise by some

talent that should lift me above mere formal priest-craft, —become great preacher and thereby move the hearts of thousands until I found myself all at once distinguished, —or write some learned treatise that should make me famous as exemplifier of the faith,—but all these paths were beyond my power. Certainly the former was impracticable, seeing that my voice is so weak and broken that I cannot lift it high; and often when the occasion comes to take upon myself alone some portion of the offices, I pause and tremble, and know that I remain unheard. What sore mortification I have met in this, perhaps you can scarcely imagine. Even now, there are times when I envy the sonorous utterances of others, drawing thereby the attention of crowds, and for the moment I feel that I would barter all my natural gifts for some such passing moment of triumph."

"And is not that the very excess of weakness?" asked the listener. "For why should the power to pour forth words that die at the instant be preferred to the rare talent of adorning the church with works that will last for ages?"

"You are right; and so, indeed, I should reason with myself. It is merely that at times there will still come back, unbidden, the old distrust of having been blessed with any serviceable talent at all. But it chanced that while thus fretting my heart with disappointment, I bethought myself of a way to achieve respect if not distinction. I dimly felt that some power of art lay in me, though I knew

not how much. But I would use it freely for all that it might avail. And this, therefore, is what I did."

With that Pere Rouflet unlocked a lower drawer of the table before him and drew forth a roll of sheets of vellum, trimmed into equal size and fastened at the back in something of the manner of a printed book. Turning the leaves slowly and carefully, he showed to his companion wondrously rich emblazonments of illuminative art. Christian monograms and texts and symbols, worked in every combination of graceful arabesque fancy which could seem possible to the imagination of man,—here standing out plainly from light background of faint tracery, there almost hidden in intricate convolutions of scroll-work,—the whole design of each emblazonment being finished in gold and purple and crimson, with such bountiful wealth of illustration that the sheets of vellum seemed like richly stained glass, and it was scarcely amiss to fancy that if held up, the light would pour through them in glowing floods of color.

"And is it a possible thing," asked the other amazed at the exceeding richness of the display, "that this most excellent work did not procure for you the merited fame?"

"What would you say? Fame, indeed? Nay, that is more than I had hoped for, even then. All that I asked was the regard of my companions, the friendly breaking down of the wall that shut me out from fellow-association, —something to show that the hearts of other men might

be moved favorably towards me, with gentle appreciation of a talent that they did not happen to possess. In this, also, I was deceived. For why should I take glory to myself or hope for others' regard, by reason of a gift that was already all too common? These trifles may seem to you more rich and beautiful than they really are, by reason of your having hitherto seen so few of such. But it is none the less true, that in every monastery through the land and even in many secluded corners where laymen work, scrolls more beautiful than these are constantly produced. And therefore, when I exhibited these to my fellow priests, I was rewarded with but faint compliment; and then both my talent and myself remained forgotten or unnoticed as before."

There was a pause and for a moment, silence. The fair Cecile would have wished to say something to show her own appreciation of the rich work spread out before her, and if possible to help heal the wound that previous neglect had inflicted; only, in the tumult of her thoughts she knew not how to word them. But from that moment, as she gazed upon the Priest and saw how his poor ill-shapen homely face was lighted up with the workings of a cultured soul within, until he seemed almost endowed with a certain quaint beauty, her mistrust of his genius passed away forever, and she felt that in coming to him she had not made mistake.

"Therefore was I once more thrown back upon my olden life of solitude and despair," continued Pere

Rouflet, breaking at last the uncomfortable silence. "But learn from me, that after all there is an upward path laid out for every one who searches for it—that there is no talent, however hidden, that will not find a passage to the light. For lo! even while I lay supine and broken-hearted in my despair, my destined course was unrolled before me. There came a day when it was necessary that a special envoy of the Church should be appointed to go to Rome, carrying thither from the King to the Holy Father, a diamond tiara, in gratitude for recovery from sudden violent illness. There were men-at-arms commanded by a Captain of the Royal Guard for protection, and a Bishop with twelve priests for dignity and state. Of the latter body I was made one; appointed partly because I was so little serviceable at home and thereby might avail as well as any other to fill out a retinue, and partly because there were others who were unwilling to go, seeing that the way was long and accounted dangerous to travellers.—Therefore I was chosen; going, let it be confessed, right willingly, since the journey would be a change from troubled thought; and moreover, besides the wish to look upon the Holy Father at Rome, I felt a desire to see those works of art, the fame of which had reached me, even at this great distance."

"That desire,—did you not even then understand it aright, Pere Rouflet?" the listener cried, almost with enthusiasm. "It was the realization of long hidden

genius, making itself known at the last, after so great tribulation."

"Nay, that may not altogether be; though of a certainty it was the desire to create for myself a talent. But be that as it may, I journeyed with the cavalcade across the Appenines, meeting few adventures by the way; and at the end we gained the purpose of our journey and placed the tiara in the hands of the Holy Father. I saw him, myself, be it said; and with the others of our embassy, received his benediction. And then, far better than all things else," continued the Priest rising and pacing up and down the narrow floor, unconscious how unchurchmanlike were his words, inasmuch as they drew comparisons of which other ecclesiastics might not readily approve, "then it was that not many days after, at Florence,—where we tarried long on our homeward route,—I looked upon the works of the great Cimabue and his pupil, Giotto, and studied the noted paintings of many others, also, drinking in as by inspiration, a knowledge of the art. There, too, I saw and conversed with the renowned Andrea del Sarto and Fra Bartolommeo, who, recognizing the longing of my heart, were pleased to teach me many principles of the divine calling. These inspirations and principles I brought home with me, saying naught upon the subject to any one, but ever revolving them over and over in my fevered mind. And when I had returned, I rolled up my illuminated vellums, as you see them now, putting them out of sight

as matter unworthy of true art; and purchased me a square of canvass, and, stealthily at first, tried my hand, seeking not original design but merely to make fair copy of what others had done before me; and in the end I found out, oh blessed discovery! that I could be a painter!"

"It is truly a great and glorious career," responded the other, catching something of his joy and appreciation, and for the instant almost believing that even she, cultured favorite of the Court, would have been content with such ambitions. "And it must be admitted, as you have said, Pere Rouflet, that in the end, true genius will discover and follow its destined path. And what more pleasant path to follow, indeed, than that which leads to so much fame? The quiet seclusion in pleasant cloister apart from all the unholy ambitions of men,—the absence of cares and worries that fret the soul and make life seem, at times, one great mistake,—the contented hours given ungrudgingly to work, with the certainty of world-renowned honor coming at the last,—the freedom from even the pleasures which the world is so greedy after, but which so often lead to pain and bitterness,—withdrawal from the cravings and conceits of earthly love and affections, which, though portrayed in song with such sweet tenderness, so often fail in their realizations of hoped-for happiness—"

Pere Rouflet faintly sighed; and the hour having expired, laid the vellum square carefully away in the table drawer.

"You say well," he responded. "If care and ambitions of earthly character could anywhere be driven from weak humanity, it surely should be so in a quiet life like mine. To-morrow let me once more take up my labor and with greater diligence, since I have to-day accomplished so little."

CHAPTER IV.

YET, as it happened, not for many days thereafter did Pere Rouflet make much more progress in his task. Daily, indeed, did he seat the fair Cecile in the carved chair, with the well adjusted light falling full upon her, and bend himself over the square of vellum with ever renewed determination to make better account of his hour's labor; and yet, each time he found that he advanced little beyond the first few faint shades and outlines, so easily was he tempted to lay his brush aside and engage in pleasant conversation. For there was so much that the young girl wished to learn about Rome and Florence,—places to which she had never been, and to which, under the social restraint of that era, she might scarcely ever hope to go,—how the Holy Father looked and what he said,—what was the art that had made Cimabue and his pupils famous, and what encouragement the great Fra Bartolomeo had given,—what curiosities had been left in Rome by the barbarians, and whether its ruins were equal to the more noted buildings in Paris; so the talk would progress, and so the hour often stole away with scarcely line or dot added to the tablet.

All this comparison of ancient and modern art and architecture, mingled with Pere Rouflet's renewed recollection of that sole journey of his life, could not in the end fail to bring the conversation round to the building wherein they sat. For not only in its day was the Church of Sainte-Clotilde one of the proud features of the Province, and therefore well suited to be mentioned with respect and admiration, even when speaking about the remains of Rome, but it was almost as Pere Rouflet's home. It was the place where he passed his days with scarcely any interruption except from the occasional companionable clang of the bells above him; the idol of his soul, which had grown into his nature as though it were a living sentient being, whispering friendly utterances to him from every stone; instinct in each line and carving with tales of the different centuries. To speak about the church, therefore, was to make him lay his brush one side and utter the building's history and praises, with forgetfulness of any present task, and with the mingled reverence and partiality we so readily bestow on recollections of a well-loved departed friend.

Those were scarcely the days wherein much outward attention was given to any building's history, to computation of the number of centuries it may have stood, or to record of those who had ever had power and authority in it. The world was too much agog with wars and tumults and the various ends and aims of territorial and personal ambition, to suffer that many persons should pause even for a

little while in their rude and bloodthirsty career, and interest themselves in the study of the past story of sculptured stone. Such seemingly useless waste of time could hold out little attraction as an especial art or science ; and the world would have simply laughed to scorn the thought of prosecuting tasks of mere curious lore that could bring no visible recompense at the end. To the headstrong men of action thick stone walls were interesting for their power to withstand mangonel and ram, and loud-mouthed bells had their only known use in summoning armed populations to defence. The thought of even chance and errant historic inquiry would be matter of wonderment, and it may be, of scoff. And yet, even at that time there were some few persons of studious and quiet nature who made it the purpose of their lives to gather up learning for learning's sweet sake,—who felt that there could be no information upon any topic which might not be worth analysis and storing carefully away,—who could see in history and archæology a science fraught with gentle and loving attraction not only for themselves but for the generations to come after them,—who, gazing up at the time-worn tower of Sainte-Clotilde and marking the quaint devices upon its remaining symbols and ornamentations, could feel impelled to turn aside from the blood-staining turbulence of the outer world and study out the church's story. These few men, scattered here and there, in garret nookery or in monkish cell, in priestly robes or in the then almost as well recognized philosopher's garb, ceased not

to gather up the scattered chronicles from old parchments and from still older legends, weaving the accumulated records in new and better ordered shape for future ages.

Of these few men, Pere Rouflet was the chief ; being not only stimulated thereto by his long-sustained love for the old church, but having access to quaint musty parchment manuscripts, mouldering away around him in hidden corners and forgotten or disregarded by all others than himself. Thence he had gathered vast store of facts, legends and tradition, which he laid away carefully in his mind for his especial pondering. To few, indeed, could he speak of them with the hope of awakening any interest corresponding to his own, and therefore it had become the habit of his life to remain silent and make little comment about the church's past days—hoping, meanwhile, that the time would come when he might gain some appreciative listener in the matter of his researches. And now that by a few chance words of interest the fair Cecile betrayed that even she might learn to love the old church for its historic past, the floodgates of his memory were lifted up, and he would sit by the hour with brush poised in hand, laboring not, except as he constantly delved into his mind to find additional material for her amusement and instruction.

He told her how that, at first, nearly ten centuries before, the foundations of Sainte-Clotilde had been laid by Clovis' pious Queen, in gratitude for victory over the heathen Visigoths and in cumulative testimony of the

nation's recent adoption of the Christian faith. How that the first foundation stone of the new building was laid in place with gorgeous ceremonial and solemn Mass, to which were given more than ordinary significance by personal attendance of an archbishop and a large retinue of priests, sent out from Rome to grace the occasion. How that thereby it came about, that not only were the rites thus favored by deputized countenance of the Holy Father, but also, through priestly example and perfection, new converts were brought into the faith and into better conformity with the requirements of the Church. How that, even after those envoys had returned to Rome, the influence of their instructions remained, and perpetually increased the throng of converts ; whereby the Church of Sainte-Clotilde so prosperously begun became at last favored with a Bishop of its own, giving it, thereby, supremacy over other churches. How that, for a long while thereafter, there was great enthusiasm for the new religion, and the plans for the building were continually from time to time enlarged, with growth of its importance ; until Clovis thought in the end to have made it almost the rival in magnificence of the basilica of the Holy Father himself.

So far the priestly student of the past told to his companion the story of Sainte-Clotilde and felt not ashamed. But, with that long-nourished sympathy for the edifice, teaching him to bear his portion in its good or ill fortunes, it required courage for him to tell what after-

wards happened ; there was so much that went amiss, so large a record of prosperity sorely interrupted and making narration of it an unpleasant task. For, as it happened, scarcely had the church reached half its destined height, with only one-third of its projected area filled out at that, when Queen Clotilde died, and with her a large proportion of the former interest in the work was lost. Then fell away, as well, much of the active labor of the Archbishop and his satellites ;—all of them weakly yielding to the base influence of that rude age and suffering the good work of the Church to go undirected, while they surrounded themselves with comforts that soon rose to the scale of luxuries,—giving themselves up, meanwhile, entirely to unholy struggle for Court preferment. Then came new and bloody wars, not merely with the Visigoths but with neighboring Christian nations, and more wars successively after those ; so that in the hearts of most men there grew up a forgetfulness of the edifice that was to have progressed so splendidly and affluently, while any consideration at all for its prosperity must have been almost useless, so long as the treasures of the Frankish nation were wasted in cruelty and carnage rather than in the culture of the faith. And so, for two whole generations, the rude walls of Sainte-Clotilde slumbered almost unregarded in their incompleteness ; and in the end, even the plans by which they were to be added to and finished were destroyed, or, what was almost the same thing, were mislaid and forgotten in some unused monastery library.

And from that time, it was a history the same as that of many edifices of the period. A season of forgetfulness to build; and then again, during some prosperous years of peace, a revival of enthusiasm. New plans with conflicting artists' conceptions brought out to replace those which had been lost, and so a few feet of additional height added to the walls. More wars to interrupt, and now and then some other short recurring season of tranquility, during which, for a little while, the suspended labor was renewed. Then other plans again, not in conformity with those which had gone before; but all the same, attracting the admiration of that especial generation, which it must be feared, loved its own work much too unwisely, inasmuch as it had learned to despise the labor well loved in its day, of previous builders. Here a little added, and there a little pulled down. The body gradually raised by effort of the Court and donation of Peter's pence, and along with it one transept feebly sketched out yet scarcely begun. A monastery built close against one side, and in the next generation torn away; leaving, however, its long, narrow refectory to be converted into cathedral cloisters. The transept at last completed after work of nearly a century, and then the corresponding transept run up in ten years by contribution of a returned crusader. Here a line of windows through gift of grateful warrior,—there a stone balustrade wrung remorselessly from culprit Jew,—anon a segment of the tower added by guilty maid-of-honor turned repentant de-

votee in her old age,—again a full set of vestments given by monarch anxious to procure atonement in advance, for intended perpetration of some gigantic wrong. So the long story went on, until at last the church stood finished,—though with portions of the earlier erection beginning to crumble away before the last stones were laid upon the bright new pinnacles—all styles and methods mingling, so that to the practiced eye, it might serve as an epitome of every age. Here a low range of toothed round arches ; and there the arches taught to raise themselves higher and to interlace, so as to sketch out fragmentary precursors of pointed architecture. Elsewhere a transept with the pointed arch raised lofty and free against the roof ; and again, a low ceiled chapel, a very spider-web of complicated and perplexing grooves and mouldings. Now rich traceries of the most redundant foliated style, and again a period of almost unpleasing simplicity. Columns shooting straight and uninterrupted to the ceiling in the purest conception of the perpendicular, and columns weighted down and almost hidden beneath the heavily clustered foliage of a later style. Niches and altars and statuary of every century, as the taste of the giver happened to incline. Sculptured tombs around the wall or in the side chapels,—with panels carved simply or in arabesque, according to the fashion of the day. The whole, at last, almost a museum of architectural effects ;—an affront, perhaps, to any one whose straightlaced taste inclined him to perfect uniformity,—a terror and a nightmare to the diverse styles

which happened to succeed it,—a thing of beauty and the grand development of a loving, trusting faith to all who might look upon it with consideration for its glorious effects of light and shade, and with memory of the many past generations which had labored upon it to the glory of their God.

All this long story of inception, advance and partial decay,—of enthusiasm, sacrifice, neglect and wrong, did Pere Rouflet tell to the fair Cecile; not in one day, indeed, but in the seances of successive days, during which the brush and pencil lay almost all the while idle beside the vellum. And there was no lack of attention in the listener, for to her the narrative had the freshness and consequent charm of novelty. Not that, thereby, her heart was turned with any of his spirit of loving zeal to churchly matters, making her enamored of those silent lights and shadows or inclined at all for cloistered life, as sometimes she had heard of maidens of the Court retiring from its gayeties and becoming the most devout and rigid of sainted abbessess. But it was something like what she had never listened to before,—this story of the past, so full of diverse human influences, ambitions, self abnegations and follies; and as Pere Rouflet went on, she felt stealing over her a little of his own distempered fancy that every stone or bit of sculpture might have its own voice from which, could she but understand the subtle language, she could learn something of the wonders of the past.

"You speak of the legends of the church, Pere Rouflet," she said. "Rehearse me, therefore, some of them; nor leave me in the mere empty knowledge that there have been such."

Pere Rouflet arose.

"Then go with me," he responded. "The few stories that I can tell will lose their charm, mayhap, while idly listening to them here. It can be only while gazing upon the things to which they relate, that one can truly feel the spirit of them."

And so, she following his lead, they passed out of the little room and into the body of the vacant church. Down one aisle, at first, to where was plain unornamented angle of the wall.

"The place," said the Priest, striking with his hand upon one side of the angle, "where it is said that many centuries ago an Abbot was walled in alive. It was said that he was worldly-minded, showing it plainly in appropriation of the riches of the Church for prosecution of undue pleasures. How true the story may be, cannot without new discovery now be told; seeing that there is no formal record of the fact and therefore it lies as yet solely in tradition. But you will note how hollow the wall sounds beneath the buffeting of my hand, and how that here no window is cut through in correspondence with the opposite wall, as surely, for fair proportion, there ought to be. Therefore it is not impossible that the Abbot met his reported fate."

"But to be walled in alive,—to starve to death! Was it not a cruel act, Pere Rouflet?"

"It may seem so to man," was the response, "but who shall say that the judgments of Holy Church are incorrect? He had committed a terrible sin; and doubtless now, if he be released as yet from Purgatory, blesses the law of punishment that killed the body that it might save the soul."

Leading the way onward, the Pere Rouflet ascended the stone tower, thence after fifty steps or so, passing out upon the roof. There, protected by the stone balcony, the two could stand in safety; and gazing down upon the city spread around them, could mark all its narrow tortuous streets, and observe the wayfarers creeping along upon them like ants. And the Priest pointed out the unsightly place along the roof where the flying buttresses had fallen down; and he told how that it had been done in former siege, when many of the most noted of the city's defenders having here taken refuge after the forcing of the walls, huge engines had been brought up outside the church, and stones been hurled upon the roof crushing in portions of it; and that thereby, the church had been taken and the defenders put to the sword. A horrible breach of sanctuary which never had occurred before, or could ever happen in all time to come; inasmuch as the leaders of the assailing force immediately became excommunicated by Holy Church and only made their peace, at the end, with great and long continued humiliation, not to speak of sacrifice of worldly possessions.

Thence once more into the tower of the church, in which, still ascending a few steps, they came to where among the other smaller bells, hung the great bell that had so often summoned the inhabitants, not merely to the altar, but to its brave defence. There was a broad foliated cross upon the side, and a long Latin inscription running around the rim ; an inscription which Pere Rouflet owned with a sigh he could not read, seeing that it was in a kind of Latin that he made no pretence of knowing ; though the Bishop had deciphered and translated it, and had ascertained, what indeed everyone might already conjecture, that the inscription was in dedication of the chime to Sainte-Clotilde, and in record, moreover, of a certain signal triumph of the faith.

"Which refers, no doubt, to the re-conversion of one Melchior, a Jew,—who lived here three centuries ago. He had become a Christian, and with good intent, it was supposed ; though thereby, it must be confessed, that he obtained much favor and countenance above all others of his race. But after a time recanting, he was justly seized, and for his sin, was condemned to be burned alive. Then it was, that it was put into his heart once more to give adhesion to the Christian faith, and to seal his convictions with gift of these bells."

"Whereby he saved his life, Pere Rouflet ?"

"Nay, not so ; for who could be sure that he might not, when safe from his bonds, recant again ? But mercifully his doom was changed from burning to strangula-

tion, whereby he had not only no time given for relapse but enjoyed less painful death."

Somewhat startled, indeed, Cecile looked furtively ascant at the good Priest; feeling herself not able, for the moment, to realize how far he felt any actual conviction of the Jew's conversion and the Church's mercy; or, on the other hand, how much of all he said was mere thoughtless expression of habitual doctrine. Those were not days in which even fair womanhood would be unable to look unflinchingly upon deeds of merciless severity; yet there seemed something amiss in the Priest's spoken sentiments, a crude and unnatural mingling of forgiving grace and cruel mockery. But they were days, as well, in which the serious utterances of the Church could not be gainsaid by lay opinion; and as she gazed into Pere Rouflet's wan face and noted its kind and gentle expressions, its earnest revelation of inward truth and goodness, and thought that, however she might be startled for the moment, she should not presume to judge differently from him, since surely his views must be altogether true, she sighed, and tried no longer to speculate upon subjects of right and wrong so intricate and puzzling in their variances.

Down from the tower into the vestibule of the church, where stood a rudely sculptured effigy in memory of a stout old bishop who had gone to Palestine with the earliest crusaders, and who, with steel plate on his heart and mitre upon his head, cross upon his armor and sword by his

side, had stood in the front ranks of the Christian hosts, and with well-swung battle-axe had cut down seven Saracens ; not forgetting to mutter over each, while felling him, a sacerdotal absolution. Then to the north transept, which had been built as an atonement by penitent baron who had slain his father, and who, his sin at last forgiven, now slept in peace. So onward to a little side chapel, the walls of which were thickly carved with sculptured tablets and the floor with plain slabs, some of which were almost illegible with the wearing away by the feet of many generations.

"The resting-place, here, of the Courtrai line,—for centuries, as you may have heard, a family mighty in matters both of State and Church,—even now still powerful as one of the great and honored lines of the kingdom."

Cecile looked up at the Priest with quick, penetrating glance, as seeking to read his thoughts, and whether he spoke with any knowledge or subtle intent. His calm, grave, thoughtful expression seemed to satisfy her, and she said :

"Tell me about these, also, Pere Rouflet. Surely there must be some history or legend attached to them, as to many others ? "

"A long and exalted line, indeed,—that is their record. Ever foremost in acts of chivalry as well as in glorious services of statemanship—known in every generation for achievements in the field and for the distinction

with which they have upheld the King's authority as honored envoys to foreign Courts. Accredited beyond these qualities with capacity for bitter hatred against such as may oppose them; in instance of which, men now speak of their long-sustained enmity towards the rival race of the Martelles."

"Tell me about that, also, Pere Rouflet. There must be some legend connected with that enmity. Indeed, it seems as though I had dimly heard as much; though with such indefinite indistinctness that it composes itself but roughly in my mind."

"Cross then with me to the other side," said Pere Rouflet," and I can tell it to you all the better; being able there to point out how the two families so long at feud, cease not to wage it even in death. See! here are the Martelles—side by side beneath the pavement; but with the whole nave betwixt them and their enemies. I can suppose that Jew and Christian would not sleep well together, seeing that the former might be visited after death by fiends, and their bodies aroused to painful writhing, to the sore discomfort of their near neighbors. But it is sad to think that men of the same Christian faith should hide away forever; each with his own and in unfriendly distance from any others."

"Yet why, Pere Rouflet—"

"It was a thousand years ago; even at the time when the first stone of the church was laid by the pious, zealous hands of Queen Clotilde. The Court were

around her,—reverent and filled with faith ;—all but one Ebroin de Martelle, who, still attaching himself to the service of the heathen gods, made loud acclaim of his belief therein, in intended sacrilege of the holy rites then progressing. For this was he well rebuked by Clovis, and put to instant silence,—preferring naturally to remain speechless thereafter, rather than to lose his life. So far, it was well, and no further disturbance need have happened ; had not Grimoald de Courtrai, in rash, impetuous zeal, made a quarrel with Ebroin de Martelle upon the spot, and, before they could be torn apart, carried the affair to the giving and receiving of wounds. It happened that while there they fought before the King, their blood fell upon the foundation-stone and upon the Archbishop's vestments. And for this sacrilege, it was said that a curse fell upon both the Houses. Whether it was uttered by the Archbishop, or, as it has been sometimes alleged, imposed by Sainte-Clotilde herself, I cannot tell. It is enough that the curse fell upon them, and has remained to the present day."

"And that curse, good Pere Rouflet ?"

"It was to the effect that enmity should reign between the two families of Martelle and Courtrai until the end of time ;—showing itself constantly in bitter strife, so that each successive generation should thereafter carry on the feud with bloodshed. And so, indeed, it has been, as the record abundantly proves ;—as I myself know, having traced the history of each family unto its source."

"And there?"

"I find that there has been no generation in which a Martelle has not fallen by hand of a Courtrai, or a Courtrai by that of a Martelle. This has been their punishment for disturbance of holy rite of consecration. While, inasmuch as it was the pagan Ebroin de Martelle who most greatly offended, it has been noted that to his line more especially, this church has ever brought ill fortune. It is said that the Abbot walled up alive yonder was collateral of that line; though that should count for nothing, seeing that the story may be altogether untrue. But there was a Martelle who was thrown from the tower three centuries ago; and one, before his time, upon whom an ill-placed corbel fell, crushing him to death. And among those who had made this place their defence in civil war, at the time when right of sanctuary was violated, there were four Martelles, all of whom were put to death upon the spot."

"A hard fate, surely, Pere Rouflet, for the sin of a brawling ancestor, and therefore not easy to be believed. May it not be some chance that has governed it all? In good truth, throughout every generation everywhere, all families give of their sons to the gods of war."

"What then, however, shall we say of Conrad de Martelle, who three or more centuries ago, went with King Philip to the Holy Land; and there slew so many of the Infidels, that his fame reached France long before he himself returned to enter upon a warrior's enjoyment of

it? Surely here was so much of goodly service to Holy Church, that he should have been allowed to go free from the olden curse. Yet before he had been home a month, lo! he slew in trivial quarrel the Duke Pierre de Courtrai. For this he was assessed in heavy sums and forfeited half his honors. See! here is Conrad de Martelle's tomb. With what was left after the fine to the King was paid, he built the clerestory of the church, and beneath it was built this vault for his remains. Above it, as you may see, in dedication to Sainte-Clotilde, hangs the sword with which he smote the Saracens. Would you not think that after such largely imposed fine to the King and his noble charities to the Church, and his faithful sword so dedicated as votive offering, the curse might at last have been stayed? And yet the coming years showed all the same that it could not be."

"Reach me down the sword of the brave Conrad de Martelle, Pere Rouflet," the other said. "I would fain behold it nearer."

The Priest complied, lifting the sword from the brackets where it lay and placing it in her hands. A woman's whim to toy with things not meant for them,—he thought —but still, he obeyed her. It was a great two-handed sword, so heavy that Cecile could scarcely hold it, but was obliged to let one end drop to the pavement.

"It is the sword with which he slew the Infidels, Pere Rouflet; perchance also, the same with which he smote the Duke Pierre de Courtrai. It may be, therefore, that the

blessing upon it for its former righteous use had fallen away by reason of its latter foul purpose."

"Rather should its first good consecrate the latter evil," rejoined the Priest. "The destruction of single man, however highly placed, should not outweigh the benefit conferred by putting many hundred unbelievers out of the world."

"But see! The blade will not now leave the scabbard, Pere Rouflet."

"It is rusted therein. And what then?"

"Whether it be rust or not, the fact remains, good Pere Rouflet, that the blade will not loosen from the scabbard," she rejoined, once more in vain essaying the task of withdrawing it. "What of that, you would ask? Why, only this, indeed; that I should look upon it as an omen that the feud is at an end and, that the curse has fallen void at last; since sword of Martelle can no more be drawn at beck of Courtrai. An omen which I would well desire to believe and trust in, Pere Rouflet; seeing that I am Cecile de Courtrai, and that he to whom I am betrothed is the Count Loys de Martelle."

CHAPTER V.

HEARING this, the Priest became pale and flushed by turns. For a moment he stood speechless against one of the great pillars, wondering within himself how he should have spoken so unguardedly to one whom he knew not.

"I have done wrong," he said at length, "in having touched so freely upon matters about which, it may be, it becomes me not to speak at all. Thereby I may have revealed secrets which should not be told, and may have sown in your heart distrust of a future that should be bright and prosperous to the end, despite all evil prognostications. Those stories that I have rehearsed may, after all, be mere matters of tradition, supported only by chance coincidence ; so that—"

"You have done no wrong, Pere Rouflet," she said with pleasant smile, and holding out her hand to him in token of forgiveness or friendship, as he might choose to look upon it. "What has been said, I knew in part before ; for it is no secret, indeed, that the Martelles and Courtrais for centuries past have been in no amicable re-

lation towards each other. I knew, as well, that with the story of that hate, there were traditions mingled, and old tales of prophesies and omens all in due time fulfilled; and of these, also, I might with slight inquiry have learned everything that you have told me. But why should I care to do so, or why having now heard them should I give anxious heed to them, seeing that the long quarrel has at last been healed, and there remains only kind and gentle intercourse, one party with the other? Let us return to whence we came, Pere Rouflet, and I will tell you all."

The Priest led the way, and together they repaired to the studio, feeling little desire for further exploration of the church. Reaching the studio, Pere Rouflet silently resumed his seat by the window, and Cecile her carved chair in front of him. There, with the sunshine pleasantly illumining with brighter lustre her golden locks, she toyed with her rings for a moment in listless spirit of embarrassment, and then commenced:

"Think not, good Pere Rouflet, that I would bear a grudge for anything you have said. It has been my fault that, for so many days, I have sat here and have not disclosed myself to you. It came by accident, since, at the very first, I did not mention who I was;—forgetting afterwards to do so, or perhaps not knowing but that you had already gained more intimate knowledge of me. After that, it would have been a difficult matter, in sudden and unexpected bluntness of speech, to utter my name with inquiry of whether you had ever heard it or not. Therefore I

now rather hail with pleasure the chance that gives me opportunity to disclose myself."

"Proceed, therefore," Pere Rouflet said, noting that for the moment she hesitated.

"I would speak, and yet I scarcely know how," she responded. "The story of the making up of the long quarrel between the Martelles and the Courtrais,—but I wonder, indeed, that you had not already heard of it, since the reconciliation has already been of many months' duration, and, at the first, gave great occasion for wonderment to the Court."

Pere Rouflet raised his head and cast a quiet glance above and around the little studio, slightly spreading his palms as though to compass a small area. The action was of itself significant of his limited sphere of observation, but in addition, he spoke:

"It is, perhaps, the lot of those who would explore the secrets of past centuries not to know those of their own; to drag to light the small details of what, even at its happening, it may be, had not attracted note, and yet to keep the eyes closed against the stir of more important incidents passing all around them. And what opportunity for news from Court or of action in the world at large has the quiet priest in this his seclusion among the implements of his art?"

"True, Pere Rouflet; and therefore I see that I must tell the story from the very first. A difficult thing to speak of, as I have premised; seeing that it must be, as

well, the story of my betrothal to the Count de Martelle. It was naturally at the Court that I first met him. I was no maid of honor, then ; being at the time too young for such promotion,—a simple girl, only just grown up, in fact, and brought to Court to look upon some passing ceremonial. And it was there that I saw Loys,—he being then almost as young as I, and without his knighthood or even expectation of it for years to come. A mere, pretty Page, indeed, and scarcely with the first down upon his cheeks,—with long curls hanging over his neck, and an ornamented dagger at his side for sole weapon,—such a youth, indeed, as now is my brother Arnulf, whom you must have noticed in our company at our first coming here. And it came to pass that Loys, mere Page as he was, and myself, an unformed damsel, took more than passing observation of each other, as such things will happen, and so at last were drawn together by mutual attraction. Only for that day, indeed, and not speaking one to the other ; through youthful shyness, in part, and more especially, perhaps, for very lack of opportunity, seeing that the Court ceremonial was not long, and that at its close I was taken back to my own home. But next year it was the same, a similar occasion bringing us together ; and then it was, that being older, we had more courage, and to each other spake. Even then I noticed how there was wonderment, and, upon the part of some, display of wrath ; for, at the Court, the Courtrais and Martelles always stood on different sides, glowering at each other

from far apart, even as in this church they lie apart in death; and it was considered that, young as we both were, we should esteem ourselves old enough to have due cognizance and recollection of the ancestral feud, and to give one to the other only scornful looks, if we so much as looked at all. But how, after all, Pere Rouflet, should mere hereditary wrong compel us, so youthful as we were, to resist the voice of nature? We saw,—we drew together,—and we spoke; uttering words of commonplace import, indeed, but with an intonation and thrill of voice that must have betrayed our feelings. Wrong as it may have seemed to both our Houses, I must believe that it could not have been the first time in the world that such a thing has happened. You have never read tales of love, Pere Rouflet, nor in your seclusion given thought to love at all. That, I well know."

The Priest bowed his head in silence, an expression of sadness for the moment flickering across his face, then passing off and leaving behind it merely the customary impassive gaze.

"Therefore, you will scarcely understand me, when I say that in our Court there are many quaint tales of love, repeated often for our entertainment, and certain of them set to verse. And of these, there are some which speak of ill-advised love-meetings in other lands, between such as through ancestral feud, should not even look the one upon the other. These I have often heard; and it seemed strange that, while the whole Court were wont to

compassionate these lovers, and all the current of the song or story would run in reprobation of the foolish quarrel that separated such true affection, in our own life there could be no similar toleration of romance, but that all our enmities, however sillily begun, must be maintained to the bitter end, with every ill consequence. Yet so it was. The Court could weep at the sufferings of lovers about whom Boccaccio tells ; and yet the next minute could scowl and lay their hands on sword because Loys de Martelle and I were not able to refrain from looking wistfully at each other."

"It seems unjust, indeed ; but all the same it is the usual hard way of the world, and we can with assurance look for nothing else."

"Doubtless you are right, Pere Rouflet.—Well, so it went on, and so it might have continued to the end ; and we could never more have spoken to each other, but rather have grown up apart and at the last, perhaps have learned even to hate. But all at once the King came forward. He had heard the whisperings and seen the glowering looks, and now he intervened for peace. It was not well,—he said,—that the old bitter feud should longer be carried on. Enough blood already had been spilt because a thousand years or so before, two brawlers had chosen to disturb the founding of a church. It was not seemly that families in a Christian state should cut each others' throats for such light cause. Were they so bent upon bloodshed, let them depart and fight the Turks,

and boast at their coming home of the number of infidel heads they had caused to roll in the dust, rather than stay at Court and make murder of each other."

"And what said they at that?"

"For a time they said nothing, Pere Rouflet. They looked at each other and bit the lip and wrinkled the brow,—as men, and even women for the matter of that, will do when sore perplexed; but yet they said not a word. Then spoke out the King again, 'I will no longer have such unseemly brawling. The next of either family that does any such murderous deed,—whether it be a Martelle that slays a Courtrai or a Courtrai that kills a Martelle, him will I hang aloft, as though he were a heathen Bohemian, and with as short a shrift. And that there may no longer be temptation for outrage, let the young Loys de Martelle now be betrothed to the damsel Cecile de Courtrai,—to be wedded when they shall be of more mature age. Their lands adjoin; and therefore, were other reasons wanting, it were a proper alliance.' So said the King, and so was it then arranged."

"And all consented?"

"All,—seeing that it was forced upon them and there could be no escape from it. Nor, let it be said, was it greatly against their will; since so many of them felt the foolishness of the olden quarrel and how that they ought not have cared to keep it up at all, only that there had seemed no authority to check it, and the pride of each prevented overtures for peace. Therefore, all

clasped hands after so many centuries of warfare, and there was great joy at Court and much formal celebration of the pleasant reconciliation. And so, good Pere Rouflet, you must see that all your cruel prophecies for the future will come to naught."

"So I trust, most truly. And surely there should be a time at last for every curse or ill-omen to have run its course."

"And doubtless, Pere Rouflet, even the dead Martelles and Courtrais will now rest more peacefully in their graves. It must, perforce, be so, indeed; seeing that I myself one day must join my husband's kin upon the further side of the nave, and thereby break up forever the unchristian separation between the rival Houses."

Thus pleasingly discoursing, in mingled narration of the past, and in bright anticipations of the future, the fair Cecile prattled on. Telling moreover, how that being so youthful at the time, she had been sent to convent retreat, there to remain until the time came for her appearance as Maid of Honor at the Court. How that the young Loys de Martelle had accompanied her to the convent gate, with retinue made up of both families. How that then Loys, stripping off the gay, effeminate dress of page, had put on the rougher attire of esquire; and, under reputable chieftainship, had at once departed in search of adventure, in order that he might gain the accolade of knighthood. How that before many months had elapsed there had come news of his brave exploits before Mantua;

whereby he had won the golden spurs, and thenceforward had title to stand beside instead of behind the King. How that then had ensued many months wherein he remained unheard from and unheralded ; and how that at at last it was reported that he had been slain in foray. How that thereupon there was much sadness felt at Court, while she learning the bitter tidings, which for a while they withheld from her, had mourned truly and deeply, refusing to be comforted, and thinking that she would resolve thenceforward to make the convent her home. How that the news had been false, seeing that Sir Loys had not been slain, but had been merely overpowered in a foray by superior force, and taken captive only after long and brave resistance. How that after many months, the tidings of his captivity had been received and his ransom paid ; whereupon, not many days before, he had returned, somewhat crippled for the time in matter of worldly goods, inasmuch as the ransom was a weighty one for knight of his quality and position, but for all that, safe and unhurt and with honors thickly crowning him. How that there was great joy at his return, not merely among the Martelles, but among the Courtrais as well, showing how permanent and sincere was the reconciliation between the two once rival families ; none among all her kinsmen showing greater joy than her young brother Arnulf, who loved Sir Loys more than all men else, and hoped to follow him to the field some day, and in like manner change the page's dress for knightly armor.

Thus Cecile now disclosed the secret of her heart. Not, indeed, telling these latter circumstances all at once, as she had more sedately made her earlier narrative ; but speaking day by day, a little here and a little there, as the mood chanced to seize her. Meanwhile Pere Rouflet from having been an idle listener resumed his labors, well contented now to encourage her to conversation, since thereby he gained so much more readily than before, the needful knowledge and perception of the sweet expressions so abundant in her varied, animated face. Finding, thus, less difficulty in his art than before, so responsive and illustrative had her nature now become,—so free, at last, from the earlier reticence and embarrassments that she had betrayed.

For now at last, so greatly was her confidence in Pere Rouflet established,—perhaps gaining force by reason of her own revelations to him,—that without stint she gave converse freely and from her whole heart, disclosing all her thoughts and speculations, her girlish vanities and her more womanly ambitions with as ready and innocent spirit of confession as she might have manifested before the most intimate of her companions. The torrent of her pretty prattle running on from day to day in constant and unchecked course ; and somehow, in whatever direction turned, ever coming back to the subject of the real and ardent affection between Sir Loys and herself.

"And indeed, good Pere Rouflet," she would say, "I know that it is true I must have loved him from the

very first, so soon and suddenly did his face and figure become fixed in my memory and regard."

"It is as it should have been," the Priest responded. "And surely it is a goodly thing for a young heart to find its true resting-place at the moment of its first timid essay at flight."

"And he, too, Pere Rouflet,—he can have never loved anyone except myself. That is to say, never with true love. Young nobles of the Court may perchance have their idle fancies;—that thing we cannot help but know. Yet that is of little consequence after all, is it not so? For such errant fancies can never be the real passion of the heart. There was one time while I was in the Court, when they say he fell for a time beneath the spell of beauty other than my own,—of a beauty of low degree, indeed, and which of a surety he might never think about or even look at, excepting from a distance. But soon he cast aside all thought of her,—considering only his duty to myself. Perchance it may have been harder than I realize for him to resist her blandishments, but you cannot know as I do, how very strong he is in purpose and self-control. Therefore he came back to me from where, indeed, he had never wandered except in thought; and I remained as ever, his first and only real cherished love. Is not that a fortunate thing to be able to say, Pere Rouflet?"

"A very fortunate thing, indeed," the Priest could not but answer. And so, from one thing to another by easy

gradations, she went on; speaking always about the Knight, his bravery, his manly beauty, his constant love for herself.—How that throughout all that war in which he had served, and in which by force of numbers he had been taken prisoner, he had remained unhurt though ever in the thickest of the fight and performing such prodigies of valor, that his name had been constantly mentioned by the King with approbation. How that at the Court, whether as page or knight, there had been no one upon whom the Maids of Honor had so unceasingly cast loving glances; and how that he had constanly resisted them all, by reason of his unbounded faithfulness to herself. All this idle prattle, running along in steady stream of girlish confidence was very pleasant to Pere Rouflet's ears; though half the time, it might be, he understood little about the subject of her talk. Day by day, however, he grew thereby to know her better, and as though he had seen her for many years; and as the portrait slowly developed itself into form upon the vellum, so did it seem as though his intimacy with the inner life of her thoughts and feelings became perpetually increased.

So for a while. Then suddenly it seemed as though she had become less vivacious in spirit,—more reserved in speech. Pondering greatly upon this, Pere Rouflet recalled that it was a mood which had been stealing over her for some time past, though with such quiet unobtrusive step, that, at the first, he had failed to give it any heed. Something, too, had gone from the lively and

pleasant animation of her face, so that she grew more quiet in expression, and at times even saddened; while once for a moment, he thought he saw tears glistening in her eyes. It might have been only his fancy,—for the next instant they were gone. However that might be, the increase of sadness was indisputable ; until at last there would be times when she would sit listless and silent, no longer stimulated into cheeriness by her recollections of the past or her anticipations of the future. There came at length a morning when Pere Rouflet determined that he would question her, and, if possible, gain from her a renewal of confidence ; so deeply did her unhappiness begin to infect his own cheerfulness, and so often does it happen that confession to another takes away half the sting of pain.

Laying his brush aside, he paused and silently gazed into her face, uncertain how he might begin. But it was not necessary that he should speak at all, for she read his full expression of inquiry, and felt that it met her willingness to seek for counsel.

"There was one day not long ago, Pere Rouflet," she said, "that I almost envied your quiet life, so far removed is it from care and agitations, even those of love. It seemed to me, then, that there was expression of doubt upon your face ; as though you believed that love, at least, of all human passions did not have its cares, or, that if it did, its consolations must outweigh them. So perhaps, they do ; yet none the less are the cares, whenever they come, very hard to bear."

"And what now, therefore——"

"I have told you often, good Pere, how pleasantly the long quarrel between the Martelles and Courtrais was made up with joyful marks of reconciliation,—how sure I felt that the new era of good-will would last forever. And now,—now I greatly doubt——"

"Has there been open quarrel since?"

"Not open quarrel, but much secret muttering, and dark glances the one side against the other; showing that the old wound was poorly healed and only on the surface, and was ready to break out again with slight occasion. Alas! that even the power of Kings cannot command the fretful hearts of subjects!"

"And that occasion of which you speak,—has it arisen?"

"Not from anything that either side has done to the other, indeed; for there is still observance of outward peace. But it seems as though the time had come when their views conflict, and the one party wishes to maintain what the other desires should be undone. This then it is, in brief. The Duke of Mantua is at Court, upon a visit. He has seen and would fain wed me. To that intent, he has gained the influence and good wishes of the King, who thinks that it is an alliance which would bind France more closely to foreign powers; and therefore he would have me break my plighted word to Sir Loys. In which design he is already supported by all the Courtrais, who look for their advancement from what they consider will

be my own, and would urge upon me a betrayal of my faith. To this, it is assumed, the Martelles will not listen ; and therefore it is that the old quarrel might easily break out anew."

"This Duke of Mantua,—is he a good and brave knight and gentleman ?"

"None more so, Pere Rouflet. Kind and gentle in manner, and of exceeding great respect. A worthy alliance for any one who was not otherwise given in affection. But with me, all his rank and worthiness count for nothing, since now I love my true Knight Sir Loys and him only will I wed."

"And therefore," rejoined the other, "it only remains for yourself to be firm and constant, and all will yet be well. Let the great Duke flourish his power and his titles in your face, as he may ; what should it avail him ? I take it for a truth that however the King may wish, he cannot go back from his royal word. Which being so, you have only to be resolute and enduring for a while, and this trouble will of itself subside, and with it will disappear all further thought of reawakening the olden strifes. Is it not so ?"

"It must be so, Pere Rouflet. Doubtless you are right. Therefore will I be constant to the end."

She sighed, while speaking ; and strove to brighten up in spirits, as one who had obtained relief. Yet so heavily did the cloud continue to lower, that the Pere Rouflet still saw its presence, and knew that her heart was not yet at ease; and he felt that she might not yet have told him all her

trouble. For none the more than before did she seem to look forward hopefully to the future. And now it happened that a new fancy seized her ; for there came sudden and greatly intensified interest in the beauty of the portrait. For a while she had displayed only partial and listless care respecting it, so perfect was her confidence that the painter's art would avail to make the work everything it should be. But now her mood regarding it had changed ; and constantly she urged Pere Rouflet to spare no exertion or trick of art to make the picture a still more glorious success than anything he had hitherto achieved.

"If I appear to you beautiful," she said, "make me still more beautiful on the tablet,—only looking to it that the likeness be not impaired. There may be defects that can be remedied and yet will leave it not less like me,—there may be graces that can be improved upon, with equal justice to the resemblance. Give to the task all the power of your highest art,—dream about it, if possible,—think about it even at the altar's foot. Only be sure that it is sufficiently beautiful, yet lifelike as well."

"Having either quality, how could it fail to have both ?" Pere Rouflet responded,—for the first time in his life venturing upon compliment.

"Let it be more than beautiful—more than lifelike," she insisted. "I would have such a picture created, that Sir Loys seeing its abounding graces, will transfer to me in imagination, whatever other qualities of excellence I do not have, and will thereby believe so trustingly in my loveliness, that never again——"

"Never again what, my child?" the other said. For, at that moment she hesitated, her color coming and going in alternate flashes of white and red. Once more, and this time without doubt, Pere Rouflet saw the tears standing in her eyes.

"Never again," she finally said, with faint accent, "will his love depart from me."

With that, she bent her face between her hands, and wept aloud.

CHAPTER VI.

PERE ROUFLET arose, and leaning over where she sat, essayed to comfort her. He felt that now, at last, the time had come in which she would throw off all further display of reticence, and tell the whole story of her troubles; and that thereby, perhaps, he might gain such intimate knowledge of her feelings as to be able to impart true consolation.

"Tell me all," he said. "I ask it not in spirit of inquisitiveness. But it may be that,—poor in worldly knowledge as I am,—I can aid you."

It scarcely needed those few words to persuade her,—so resolute had she now become to let nothing of her trouble remain unrevealed. And so,—her trusting nature not differing from what it had always been, but simply her power of concealment coming to an end,—she told the whole story of her wrong. It was not merely that the Duke of Mantua had desired to wed her, and to that intent had gained the consent and influence of the King; and thereby had encouraged her kin, with hope of family advancement, to covet a discontinuance of their late

league of peace. Such matter was indeed of alarming import; yet even that trouble she could afford to despise, and doubtless, in the end, could trample down, through the power of her true and constant affection for Sir Loys, were he—would he in turn remain faithful unto her. But therein,—alas! therein was the very wretchedness of all! She had once told Pere Rouflet,—surely he must remember,—how that while still at the convent, it was said that the Knight had been attracted by a face as fair, perhaps, as her own. The face of a maiden of the people, indeed; of such diversity of condition that he must perforce stand aloof and admire it only from the distance and seclusion of his higher rank. Perhaps that young girl might not ever have known about his admiration of her; it was certain that he had prudently held himself aloof from her acquaintance. It had been supposed that, all this while, his heart had not been touched,—that he had felt mere passing admiration for that young girl, forgetting her almost as soon as he had seen her. And yet, as it now seemed, it might have been more than that.

"And oh! Pere Rouflet, shall I tell the reason why?"

"Speak without fear," he answered.

"That beautiful picture of Sainte-Clotilde, over the high altar,—did you not say that it was copied from a living face? It may have been from some one who had resembled the girl whom he had loved,—it may even have been from the girl herself. Whichever it may have been, what matter? For I fear the sad truth remains,

that it is a face reminding him of her, and thereby, perhaps, recalling to him a love for her which may have once existed in his heart; unknown to her, perchance, and which, for himself, he may have vainly imagined he had long since crushed."

"And yet, why do you imagine all this?"

"You ask me why, Pere Rouflet? Because of late his manner towards me has so greatly changed. He will speak lovingly to me as of old,—sometimes more lovingly than ever; yet in evident disguise of some alteration in his heart's affections, and I cannot help but feel that his words have not their former tone of truth. He will look upon my face with gaze of admiration, yet I can instinctively decipher his expression and see plainly that it comes not from a real vital prompting of the soul. And he is silent and fraught with fretful moods, as never before; often drowned in thoughts, the nature of which he will not impart to me; turning the matter off with careless laugh, if I undertake to press him."

"All this—"

"All this, you will say, is but the consciousness of the existence of the King's plans against him, in favoring the Duke;—a feeling that all is not right as concerns ourselves, thereby putting anxiety into his heart, and, as generally will happen in such a matter, changing the outward habit of the mind. So I first thought, or rather tried to think. But what will you say when I tell you that yesterday, Sir Loys being at my side, and, as so often

of late, immersed in gloomy thought, seemed unaware for a moment of where he was or who had spoken to him; but, when I addressed him, turned in vacant, forgetful manner, and called me 'Manon?' Me, who always hitherto hath been to him only 'sweet Cecile?' And when I heard him so speak, the chill of death sank into my heart; for I remembered that such was the name by which you had spoken of the fair original of the altar painting. And as though this were not enough, each day he comes alone into the church and passes many moments gazing up at the picture, as if it brought back to him some regretful recollections of long past, and it may be, happier days. In all that, is there not some indication of the waning of his love? See! even now, as you glance through that little pane of glass in the studio door, you can observe Sir Loys standing before the picture, and devouring, with greedy gaze, its every line and impress."

Truly enough, as following her suggestion Pere Rouflet peeped through the little pane, so arranged that it could be looked through outwardly but not in reverse, he saw the Knight standing near by and gazing up thoughtfully and with saddened expression at the picture of Sainte-Clotilde. A deep settled frown was upon his face, and, as once before, he remained nervously biting the ends of his long mustachios. These are commonly indications of anger, indeed, but he was not angry. It was merely the manner whereby a strong man will often

endeavor to conceal remorse or grief. Therefore, when Pere Rouflet turned again to his companion, it was with the conviction that she was right in believing that all was not well. Yet he would, if possible, comfort her.

"Surely it should not be a matter of much concern," he said, "that Sir Loys gazes so long at a mere work of art. Such fancy is not unknown,—has heretofore been of wide experience and doubtless will often be so again, and that without injury or corruption to the heart. May it not be that it is to the taste of the mind, only, that he thereby appeals? I have spoken to you about Italy, the home of art. I speak whereof I know, when I tell you that in both Rome and Florence there are many stories and traditions of men of great reputation and consequence, who have had their minds taken captive and their senses enthralled by beauteous creations of the artists, so as to stand before them for many hours every day, and feast their eyes upon what was so pleasing to them. But each one, at the last, has broken from the spell and returned to his own mind again, with heart and judgment unimpaired. So might it even be with mine own self, let me now say. For I must needs confess what I have hitherto not told to any one, that at times I am overcome with such childlike admiration of that creation of my own, that when there seems no fear of observation by others, I stand for long periods together gazing upon it, even as Sir Loys now looks up. Would it be just," he continued, with color somewhat

heightened and voice slightly repressed, "if, seeing this, there should be any who charged me with earthly love for the fair original of the picture?"

"It is your own,—it is your right, even your duty to look upon it with admiration."

"Yes, in truth; with admiration. But who shall undertake to say that my outward admiration goes further than is seemly, and that it thereby becomes love? And if not with myself, how much the less with Sir Loys? Therefore, strive not to think more about it. Even were it at all as you imagine, it is more than probable that it springs from transitory feeling that will soon yield to time and so will vanish. Are we not continually bringing vain troubles upon ourselves by imagining evil consequences that fail to happen? It may be so in the present matter. Put on, therefore, your smiles once more; and it may be that even the coming day will witness your release from trouble."

Thus encouraging her, he succeeded in bringing a flickering smile into her sad face, and she made ready to depart, for the instant marvellously comforted. In order that she might not risk encounter with her betrothed and so make betrayal of her secret, Pere Rouflet released her at a little side door; then, determining to have converse with the Knight, so as if possible to gain a true conception of his feelings, he passed into the body of the church, and slowly, and with apparent listless step, wandered towards the altar. Reaching this, he paused; and for a

moment standing beside the other, silently awaited the result. For a few minutes the Knight paid him no regard, but remained with eyes fixed upon the picture, in spirit of deep and mournful revery. Then as Pere Rouflet moved slightly, thereby softly brushing against his shoulder, Sir Loys started and eyed him askant, with inquisitorial glance.

"A famous work, this picture of yours," he remarked, after a moment recovering himself. "One, I should think, that would have added greatly to the fame of many painters whom fortune has made more widely celebrated than yourself. Modelled from some young damsel of the people, whom you have met and been attracted towards, for her saintlike beauty; did you not say?"

Pere Rouflet bowed assent.

"And—and a holy penitent of your Church, I think you told me?"

"I did not say that, Sir Knight."

"Nay, then it must surely be that I imagined it. Yet rightly so, I do not doubt. And was her penitence begun for one single fleeting fault, or for a long career of sin?"

"Neither does it become me openly to speak of that, Sir Knight. It would be an ill thing that I should betray the secrets of my calling."

"True,—the confessional again. An institution doubtless worthy of great reverence; and yet methinks there must often be found occasion wherein it may interfere with justice, even more than at other times promoting it.

As now, indeed. For, could there be given answer to that question I have asked, how greatly might it not comfort the heart of one—of a dear comrade-in-arms of mine! Of my own age and station, Pere Rouflet. He loved a young damsel,—loved her with all his heart and soul. Once, I had occasion myself to see her, inasmuch as he was proud of her beauty and her affection for himself, and was willing that all who were near to him in friendship should be able to look upon his happiness. And now, as it happens, in that picture I recognize something of likeness to her. Nay, let me rather put away any show of mystery, and own at once that the young girl of whom I speak must have been the very same from whom that picture has been painted."

For a moment Pere Rouflet gazed upon the ground, hiding as much as possible his own expression; with not ill judged or mistaken conjecture that the Knight, having made that poorly veiled show of frankness, in concealment of his own identity in the matter, might be watching to see how far the deceit would prove effectual. It was not easy, therefore, for the Priest to force back the flush of consciousness or maintain a guileless appearance.

"And your comrade-at-arms, Sir Knight," he said at last, "loving her so well, but being himself of such higher rank that there could be no question of marriage between them,—he wisely and warily looked upon her from a distance; was it not so?"

This he asked, well knowing now, as he put the gathered

threads of circumstance together, how the matter must have really been; and yet, as he remembered how the fair Cecile in her innocence had told the story, hoping that the Knight could offer some plausible correspondence with it.

"Ha! from a distance, did you say?" And the Knight gazed upon him for a second with something of contemptuous surprise; wondering at his apparent innocent ignorance of the world, even as the other wondered that there should be any dream of successfully disguising love beneath the fiction of a pretended comrade. "Ah me!" and the contemptuous look almost instantly passed away, with mournful recollections of a happy past, "it was not,—it could not be so, indeed. For he was no monastery-bred ascetic,—this comrade of mine,—and for a while, the damsel loved him well; and there was no one who should have power to say that they could not meet as often as they wished. Even she to whom my comrade stood betrothed was secluded from all knowledge of the world within convent walls, and could not well hear of what he did. Therefore he,—my comrade, that is, and Manon,—often met; and for a single month he was supremely happy in her love. And after that, happy no longer, for she fled from him."

"She abandoned him, you say?"

"Yes; abandoned him forever, leaving behind her a single note of farewell, telling him that she had repented of the evil of her life and never more would see him.

Ah, the sad blow that it was to him! For he had so greatly loved her—that, indeed, I know full well—and he could never more be happy. Yet not all the while feeling in the same spirit, either. He was a man of proud and variable nature; and there were moments when, let him struggle against it as he might, his mood would change and he would almost persuade himself that she had not left him merely for conscience sake, loving him the while as well as ever, but that she had falsely forsworn herself for some more wealthy rival, and had never loved him at all. Then, indeed, his anger would blaze out against her as fiercely as, at other times, his love reached forth."

"It is, perhaps, very natural, Sir Knight."

"Perhaps. But be that as it may, it was his manner. At the first, bowed down with despair and grief,—then angered, at times, with his doubts of her. So alternating between the two passions; yet little by little, as he heard nothing further from her, feeling that his faith even in her former love was ever growing less, and his suspicion of her treason more assured. And so he gradually grew more calm, bringing himself into constant and increasing certainty that she was unworthy even of his memory; and at length, turning to her who had so long been his betrothed, he strove to give himself up to that earlier and more trustful love. But here is where is felt the bitterness of his life, Pere Rouflet. I fear that there still remains, secluded in his heart, some little spark of passion, ready

with provocation to be fanned into its olden glow. I know that, for the preservation of his present love, he would fain forget the object of his former affection, yet cannot do so. I feel, indeed, that were he even to look upon yonder picture, so replete with grace and innocence and beauty, it might move him to renewal of his regretful passion. And so—"

"And so, Sir Knight?"

"So it is that I deplore the enforced secresy of the confessional, whereby this little matter cannot be disclosed. Assuredly, I now know, this young girl must have fled, in the end, to seek for penitence and peace. But when? If it had been upon first abandoning my comrade, then I feel that his unhappiness and remorse might return in all their former power. I would not that this should happen to him. If, on the other hand, she had deserted him for another—perhaps for many others, in succession, coming to repentence only through weariness of the world,—then it seems better that he should truly know it. For then, indeed, his doubt of her treachery would be at an end, his grief subdued, his pride sustained and his earlier love remain forever fixed and faithful. Not his happiness alone, therefore would be thus assured, but that of her as well, who is to be his loving and trusting bride."

Still nervously biting the end of his long moustache,—still striving to frown away the emotion that partially hindered his utterance, the Knight gazed almost implor-ingly at Pere Rouflet, seeming to beg that he would tell him

what he so much desired to know. What could Pere Rouflet say? Even had Manon been untrue to the Knight, and the knowledge of the fact would so greatly calm his mind and give renewed happiness to his destined bride, it was not for Pere Rouflet to tell it. No cause on earth could warrant the betrayal of that secret. But how much greater need of reticence, when he knew that if he were to speak the truth, he must tell him that Manon had fled from the Knight's arms at once to the shelter of the Church—how that no reason other than her sincere repentence had impelled her,—how that she had lived for months heart-broken at the separation from him and the fear that he might be thinking ill of her,—how bitter was often the struggle not to return to him and sacrifice all the fruits of her penitence,—how that even now she often awoke with his name upon her lips! No,—even if permitted by his office, Pere Rouflet could not dare to betray all this. Therefore he held his speech.

"Did you have anything to tell me, Pere Rouflet?" the other inquired at last, still gazing fixedly upon him.

"What should I say, Sir Knight? You must tell your comrade that confidences committed to me cannot be betrayed,—and that if he feels true penitence for any wrong he has ever done, comfort will come to him at last."

"I will tell him that, since it is all you have to say to him," responded the Knight, after another moment of still steadfast gazing, during which he seemed to desire to search into the other's soul and wrest its secret from

him. "But know, Pere Rouflet, that he will not be satisfied with such empty words as those; and that, if he has ever before blamed the Church for want of sympathy, he will now more likely curse it for an intolerant and hardened spirit."

With that, he turned upon his heel and left Pere Rouflet standing alone.

CHAPTER VII.

PERE ROUFLET remained confused and motionless, gazing up vacantly at the picture, which now seemed to him to glow with more gorgeous brightness than even before. Was this sunlit radiance a type or manifestation of Heaven's approval of the thoughts that filled his heart? And yet, those thoughts brought no comfort to himself, but rather a sense of degradation, since they appeared only in the light of subtle tempters to a wrong.

For, as he reflected upon the tearful misery of the fair Cecile, who in the expansiveness of her happiness had so lately exposed her whole heart before his gaze, there came upon him the desire to aid her in the only way that now seemed possible,—to rehearse some fabricated story of Manon's past penitence for many acknowledged sins, so that Sir Loys would be able to turn his heart again from her and give it once more unto his lawful love. What though thereby the memory of another should be outraged? She would never know it, and the happiness of the destined bride would from that time be saved.

What though Manon should come ever to know it, after all? Surely she would not too strictly take the full measure of the sin, so long as she knew the purity of its intent; while, in her abundant charity of heart, she would not regret the withdrawal of that far-off earthly love, when so well assured that its new bestowal would make a Heaven in the heart of her to whom it more rightfully belonged.

These disordered thoughts, these cruel temptations to do evil that good might come, went whirling in ceaseless round through his mind, as there he lingered and gazed upward. At last, however, he threw them off, as enemies to his own peace, and with that victory stood again with soul erect. One thing, however, he knew must be done. No longer now, than might be needful to finish the work he had in hand, should there be those daily meetings with Cecile in the quiet seclusion of his studio. It was pleasant, indeed, to sit and gaze listlessly upon her face, while still more listlessly, it may be, he prosecuted the task before him. A line here and a shade there,—often not even that progress made during the allotted hour, which glided softly away in conversation rather than in art. A cheery thing, indeed, to sit with brush held idly in his hand, while from those earnest lips he listened to stories about the Court which he had never seen and the great outer world into which he had so seldom ventured. Seasons of romance, almost, were these to him, gilding a life of drudgery and sombre detail that seldom had had any joyous light

thrown upon it. And now, as soon as possible they must be brought to an end ; since, if persevered in, almost any day the longing Knight and the long lost penitent might have the ill fortune to meet in the old church, and the secret of each disastrously become betrayed.

So determining, Pere Rouflet drew from the table drawer the vellum square, and studied it long and carefully to see how soon it could be finished. It was almost finished now, indeed,—so it would have seemed to another ; —for already, even through his dilatory labor of the last few days, the likeness had been attained and lights and shades had been thrown in and properly disposed, and there appeared little else to do. At careless glance, it was the completed portrait of a peerless loveliness ; yet as the artist gazed upon it with increase of critical and comprehensive attention,—the practice of his art having taught him to look beyond mere matter of physical beauty,—he sighed, for there was something wanting in the picture. The sadness of the past few days, not intended to be copied, had nevertheless left its impress, obliterating much of the first effect obtained from observation of her sunny smiles and intelligent vivacity ; and now the picture stood rather as likeness of mere form and outline than of true expression. It was as though, apart from any outward grace of attitude and feature, there was no proper delineation of soul, linked with the inner springs of nature and replete with impassioned fervor and intensity of heart. Nothing more captivating, indeed, at the first glance, than that

semblance of heavily fringed hazel eyes ; yet still there was lacking some suggestion of their ceaseless play of vivacity and merriment, without which it was a portraiture of mere surface loveliness. There was not visible that almost indefinable something ; which, through other eyes less beautiful will often so eloquently and naturally speak of richer and more abounding graces within. As the painter bent over his work, his heart felt weary within him. He realized how feebly he had now succeeded, in comparison with his one other work of portraiture. In that, whether it was that the task had been more easy or his heart more earnestly devoted to its perfect fulfilment, he had won a satisfying success. Manon's sweet, quiet, dreamy repose, into which, as into a tranquil, unruffled pool, he could peer far down and gain some comprehension of the nature of its inner depths,—her dark-brown contemplative eyes, so eloquently telling their story of soul-absorbing revery and thought,—these, indeed, had been reproduced in all their calm and radiant loveliness, making a picture before which the devout could reverently bow,—the picture of a being to be loved throughout eternity by satisfied and responsive hearts, or, if trust were broken, to be remembered as long, with equal power of hate, but never capable of leaving lukewarm memories. For many minutes, Pere Rouflet sat and pondered over this variation in his success,—wondering whether it was due to the fair originals themselves or to his own less enthusiastic interest in the task. Then, hear-

ing a slight movement as of some one entering, he looked up and started, seeing before him the living representative of the former picture.

"Manon?"

"You did not expect to see me, Pere Rouflet? And indeed, I have been absent for so long, that it must have seemed as though your penitent had forever strayed away. But I have been very ill, Pere Rouflet,—too ill to come before."

"Sit down, Manon, and let me look at you and hear all that you have seen and done."

She sank down opposite him, in the high backed carved chair where the fair Cecile had been wont to sit. How different the two! The one a tall and graceful figure, replete with types of radiant loveliness that forced themselves unresistedly upon the eye with full power of their engaging, alluring superfluity,—with face, which, when the heart had been at ease, shone brightly as an earthly representative of joyous, sunny Hebe. The other,—small, careworn and wasted in feature,—a being of retiring, shrinking habit, scarcely therefore likely at first sight to attract another's notice, and now keeping the few poor traits of beauty that she might still possess carefully concealed and shrouded in coarse serge dress and heavy gray hood. Nor, when she threw back the hood and disclosed more openly her small, unadorned head, with its wealth of dark brown hair smoothed almost out of sight beneath a plain white band, would the observer have

seen, at the first, any especial attraction in her. And yet, it needed only a moment more, it may be, to take note of the dark earnest eyes replete with thought that gave meaning and intensity to the whole expression, and the lips that in their quiet, sedate curves harmonized so perfectly with the deep power of the eyes; and with that, the looker-on would not have failed to comprehend how in that pensive face must lurk subtle fascinations, which, were she disposed to make use or revelation of them, might easily command a devotion refused to more brilliant and openly asserted charms.

"Tell me, Manon, what have you to say?" Pere Rouflet continued, after a moment of silent contemplation. There was expression of discomposure in his tone; for he had noted the wasting of the little face and figure, —a wasting away, it seemed to him, that had been less apparent even when he had last seen her, a month before.

"Do you remember, Pere Rouflet, when first I came hither, almost a year ago? I was a poor unknown girl; and from that circumstance, indeed, but little entitled to a stranger's care and sympathy. I made confession of a fault,—such confession as one may make without betraying other name than my own; and I thought to obtain absolution and such advice as in your full occupation of time could be given,—then to go my way again and here be no more seen. But you were kinder than I had ever hoped, and you talked long and earnestly with me, inquiring deeply into my mind; and you gave me such

advice as was new to me, but which still, even then, commended itself urgently to my heart."

"I recall to mind," said the other, "that, observing in you no mere transitory fever of repentance, I knew you for an earnest soul, and recommended entrance into a convent."

"It was so. Nor was the advice greatly contrary to my own desire. Yet still, I thought, there should be some other and different life more suited to me. I reflected that it might not be enough to vanish from the world between convent walls, and thenceforth look only to my own benefit; but that it were better to make amends for what had passed, by striving, as much as lay in me, to do good towards others. There are so many sick and miserable people in the world, good Pere Rouflet, and so few to aid them,—is it not so?"

"It is so, indeed."

"Therefore I said, that I would go about among these sick and miserable, and do for them what I could, and as long as my strength held out. And I further said, that if ever the time came wherein my ability so to do might fail, then I would ask you to find a refuge for me in some convent home, so that others might give me their loving care, and smooth my way into another world. Do you remember my saying that?"

"I recall it, Manon."

"It is well. And now—the time has come, dear Pere Rouflet."

As she spoke, she pushed the loose gray sleeve partially up one of her arms, more by that action than by any especial look, directing the other's attention thereto, in explanation of her remark. Pere Rouflet turned pale; was this the end of all? That thin emaciated arm, betokening beyond doubt or question the wasting away of all the frame,—could there be no restorative here? He turned his gaze thence upon her face; and now he saw there also, the undeniable signs of illness and debility. The hollow cheek and the thin, pinched lips,—those well known evidences of decay now so plainly visible; and the large dark eyes seeming, by the contrast of their undiminished power with all things else, more deep and earnest than ever, in their quiet intensity of gaze—

"There must—there shall be some relief for this, Manon," said Pere Rouflet, striving to give cheerful tone to his failing voice.

"None that we know of, Pere Rouflet," and she smiled as she spoke. "Why should I hold out for myself hopes that can never be realized, seeing that I have so often, during this last year, watched these signs in others and never known them fail? A few weeks—a few months at the most,—and then, the last in this world of poor Manon. You will not miss her greatly, kind Pere? A pleasant thoughtful memory of her, at chance moments, it may be; but otherwise you will not be sad about her?"

Pere Rouflet looked down at the floor and almost groaned aloud, with difficulty refraining himself.

"Why, too, should I regret it, dear Pere Rouflet? A few years more or less,—and the issue must be all the same. And surely this life of mine has not been such a joyous one of late that I should lovingly cling to it, or that feeling it passing from me, should refuse to reconcile myself to losing it. True, I have tried to do a duty in expiation for the past, and perhaps in some degree have succeeded, yet scarcely without many pains and sorrows attending it, and sad recollections clouding every moment. And now that my life is drawing to a close, may it not be that at some convent of which you have control, they will consent to receive and take care of me until the end,—even to welcome me, it may be, for the poor little good that I have tried to do? Will it not be so, kind Pere?"

"And when do you propose—"

"Ah Pere Rouflet, that is what I scarcely know, myself. My failing strength tells me that the time should be even now;—my will and inclination say that I should wait awhile. Hardly do I know, myself, what I should do; and therefore I would ask for counsel. And yet to ask for that counsel I must tell so much that I scarcely know how to tell."

"Explain yourself, Manon."

"It is this, Pere Rouflet. Daily, for weeks past, I have felt my strength failing me and the languor of death stealing over me, and have known that the convent retreat must be near at hand. But daily with a stronger will have I resisted, feeling that there might be much more in this

world for me to do ;—much more—much more for me to learn. Yet only last evening, I was passing through the street to a patient whom I must not neglect to see, inasmuch as she had learned so longingly to expect me, when I felt such weakness creeping over me, that for the moment I could not proceed. I clung for support to what came nearest to my hand, there rested for many minutes, then for awhile recovered. Then, too, I saw that what I had grasped was the handle of a convent door, by the mere turning of which handle, I might find rest. Was it Heaven that had thus directed my steps, good Pere? Was it a suggestion that it became my duty to follow?"

"It is hard to say, Manon ; and yet it might be that—but what followed then?"

"Only that, for a moment, I was tempted to enter and make an end of all the struggle. But almost as soon, there came contrary impulses. How could I enter there and cut myself asunder from all outer ties and not say farewell to those few sick who had learned to love and look for me, and would not know the true reason for my continued absence, and would thenceforth blame me for desertion and it might be, would wilfully think harshly of me? Nay, I could not surely give occasion for all that."

"Yet, Manon, it would not take many hours for you to make farewell to such as these, and allay all possible occasion for reproach."

"True, Pere Rouflet. But then again,"—with that, for a moment, she dropped her gaze and seemed to play idly

with her wasted fingers, while her color came and went; and it seemed to Pere Rouflet as though already she was repenting of her proposed confidence and would speak no further. "Then again," she continued with an effort, "there came of a sudden, the rush of past memories—coming as with force of whirlwind—telling me to wait a little longer; for that if I did so, I should hear more about one—about one from whom long ago I had forever parted. You know a little about what I mean. For I had hitherto, —at my first coming here, indeed,—told you that I had fled from some one, and that my sin had consisted in love for him. I did not—I had no right, perhaps to tell his name; seeing that it would be betrayal of his confidence and would not make difference in my own soul's welfare. Therefore you have never known who that person was."

Pere Rouflet looked down again, in mortal fear lest she might read his thoughts, and thereby, of course, his knowledge. But though, in spite of all he could do, he felt his color come and go, Manon suspected nothing.

"But that there was such a person, so much you know. I left him secretly—the world would say, ungratefully. And though I strove to soften the blow, if blow it were to him at all, yet it must be that I then earned his hate. I shall never see him more, Pere Rouflet,—should never have seen him again, even were he living; and—and he is dead. Died on the battle-field, I was told, in some wild foray of arms,—dying, they say, as bravely as he had lived. But what to me were brave death, so long as I could not feel that he had forgiven me?"

"And how, Manon—"

"I know your question, and I cannot answer it. Indeed I cannot tell how I may ever know that he has forgiven me. Yet this one thing I can affirm. Though hitherto, strive to repress the feeling as I may, he has never been absent from my mind, it has always been with the tender mournfulness with which one thinks or dreams about a loved, dead friend; and in that, indeed, there can surely be little sin. But yesterday, as I stood against the convent door, determining whether I should enter or not, there came, with other thoughts, this sudden, strange, unanticipated and far different remembrance of—of him. Coming with torrent rush,—a feeling, that if I were to wait awhile, I might hear again of him,—a strangeness of sensation as though he were not dead but stood very near to me—or, being dead, as full well I know that he must be, his spirit were whispering something to me. And with that, I released my grasp from the convent door and hurried away. Some time,—not many days distant perhaps,—I must return thither, and to remain; but can you blame me, kind loving Pere, in that I have listened to that inward prompting which bade me wait a little longer?"

"Rather not wait a single day!" cried Pere Rouflet rising from his seat and pacing the little room in sudden tumult of disturbing fear. For to what unhappy end did not all things now seem tending? The Count Loys each day devouring with his whole soul the portrait of his lost love, forgetting thereby half his duty to his promised

bride,—that promised bride beset with plans and conspiracies against her peace, new destinies planned out for her only to be thwarted by the power of a constant affection which any hour might be shaken into dissolution by well assured jealousy,—Manon herself encompassed with mysterious premonitions of the living presence of one whom she had believed dead;—what might hinder that at any moment, two of these persons should meet, and terrible disturbance and ruin thereby overtake them all? "Not for a single day!" Pere Rouflet repeated. "Do you not now see that these impulses must come from the Evil One for your destruction?"

"The Evil One, did you say?" responded Manon, in superstitious affright.

"Whence else, indeed? Did not the temptation to delay come at the very moment when you had your hand upon the convent door, in readiness to seek the peace only to be found within? At what other season do these temptations certainly assail us, as when thus urged by good impulses?"

"It may be so,—I will not say nay, Pere Rouflet."

"You thought, then, of him whom you had left,—remembered him with love, though you knew that it was your urgent duty to struggle for forgetfulness of him altogether! Knew that you had done right to leave him, and, that whatever strange thoughts might afterwards come, you could never see him more! That even were he not dead on earth, yet he was dead to you, his existence being for you

only of the past! That were he not dead and you should ever meet him, it must only be to cast your eyes away, lest temptation should assail you once again and destroy all the good you had done in penitence! That were he not dead and were he even to pursue you, your duty would be to flee and put away every charm that might still please him, and rather seek to educate his heart to hate you, than again to love!"

Turning with this burst of impulsive passion once more towards her, Pere Rouflet looked earnestly to mark its effect. Seldom, before, had he spoken to any one with such determined energy;—surely she, who had always seemed so ready to follow his slightest counsel, would not now dream of disobeying him. That poor pale wasted face that even in its utmost strength of long past days had borne for him such impress of assent to his utmost will,—there should not now be any token of rebellious purpose written on it. But as he gazed, he beheld a power of resistance that he had never hitherto there noted,—in the flash of dark eye and close-set lip, a calm unalterable purpose not to be overcome by vehemence of authoritative language. Had he gone too far? Had he said anything that could make her suspicious of the truth? Such things did often happen, and the very impulsiveness of caution might engender distrust. It was not so now, indeed. Yet to almost equal purpose of resistence was her consciousness of unjust lack of confidence in her own strength, and of tyrannical intent to overthrow her better perceptions of what was needful.

"You speak from your heart, Pere Rouflet, and doubtless as you conceive it best for me," she answered; and in her own sense and power of strength and determination she too arose and stood erect. A small, frail figure, indeed; but so impressed with every outward sign and import of calm internal resolution, that the other, already exhausted by his own unaccustomed violence, stood beaten and baffled before her. "But how can I fully trust that you now advise aright; knowing, as you do, so little about my real strength of purpose, or of the impulses and emotions that bid me exert it? Doubtless the Evil One may have power to assail; to me is given also, power to resist. I will not timidly turn away from contest with him and seek safety in flight,—not even to the refuge of convent walls, as long as there is anything for me to do outside. The sick girl whom I must visit lest she may think me an ingrate for seeming regardless of her love,—the child who has learned to look for my coming as though I were its mother,—the wounded man-at-arms who has heard for months no sisterly voice other than mine,—do you think that I should prove neglectful of such as these, or that the Evil One would imagine he could do himself a service by keeping me at their side? And then——"

"Then what, Manon?" said Pere Rouflet, in saddened and faltering tones, seeing that she hesitated.

"Then, Pere Rouflet," she continued, taking new resolution and power of fortitude upon herself, "then there

is this, also, that I must say. A year ago I left the only person whom I had ever learned to love; hoping that I should never see him more. But I do not yield to your opinion that it could ever be my duty to forget him. Had he lived, I might never have looked upon his face again; but none the less would I have followed him in my thoughts with all holy regard, and would have forever wished him well. Now that he is dead, I can do the same, and hope for his welfare in another world than this, nor blush to own it. And I tell you, good Pere Rouflet, that however sinful it may seem to you, there was more of reason, mysterious as it may be, in the perceptions that assailed me at the convent gate, than I can venture to disregard. The thrill that crossed me,—the sudden realization that in some way he might be near me,—the inner voice that told me I might before long hear of him,——"

"Yet how, indeed, could that be, Manon? Seeing that on the battle-field—"

"How,indeed, Pere Rouflet? That, surely, I cannot tell; only I feel that it must be so. You know that of all things on earth, I have pined for his forgiveness. What if on the battle-field where he lay dying, he had chanced to call my name? What if some surviving comrade had heard him do so; and comprehending that it was with accents not of rough scorn or hate but of sweet forgiveness and love, that comrade were to come and tell me of it? Would it have been well, if meanwhile I had shut myself up from all the outer world, away from one syllable of those pleas-

ant tidings; and so, for want of them, were to eat up my heart in the agonies of despair? All this might not so happen,—could scarcely be, as in my more sobered moments, I realize; but then, other events or circumstances might be at hand to restore to me something of the older joy. Be it as it may, something has told me that I must wait; and so will I now do."

"And until how long, Manon? For it cannot be wrong that I should ask so much as that?"

"Nay, good Pere, it is not wrong; nor, in intent, is anything wrong that you ever do. Wait then a week,—even two weeks, let us say. I may not in that time lose so much strength, that they will not receive me, do you think? In two weeks, then, I will be ready, and will make no longer opposition."

"In two weeks, then, let it be," responded the other, with a heavy sigh; a sigh of mingled sorrow that the time of danger should be so long extended, and of satisfaction that he had her promise at the last. "Meanwhile, take good heed of your health and be not abroad too frequently. And remember likewise that these are two weeks of probation to your soul, during which the Evil One will sorely strive to tempt you, even to putting himself in false imagery before your eyes. Should he so do, fly in affright and fear; even if, as might be most possible, and as the most tempting allurement he could offer, he should assume the shape of him whom you had so greatly loved."

CHAPTER VIII.

WITH that, Pere Rouflet released her at the little side door, where previously he had sent away Cecile ; with same intent now as then, that Sir Loys should not, by any chance, be encountered. This done, he sank again into his chair, spread his arms across the table, placed his face thereon, and softly wept.

He realized now, what before he had only dimly suspected and dreaded,— his love for Manon. Why this should be so, since all his life he had held himself with meek reserve away from any thoughts of other's affections, he could not tell ; it was enough for him that it had so come about. Why at the last, after looking unmoved upon much abounding loveliness, he had been destined to fix his heart upon one whose beauty was so retiring and unobtrusive that it must be studied ere it could fully be realized, was as mysterious as the rest. Yet had it not been the same with Sir Loys, who even now, in memory of that past love, could almost forget the rich, full graces of pure affection that bloomed for him at his very side? How it was that Pere Rouflet had now become

awakened to the full conception of this terrible heart's mistake, it was easy to perceive. Doubtless he might have continued to meet Manon month after month and year after year in the same old spirit of mere friendship, giving her all necessary counsel and parting from her with formal benediction, but for the jealous feeling inspired by Sir Loys' return. Had Manon even gone that day into convent life, and in such seclusion been forever buried from the world, Pere Rouflet would have borne it calmly, and would have simply sighed for her as after a well-trusted friend whom at last he had lost; but it had become no more the mere longing of friendship, now that danger pressed so closely and that he so well perceived in which direction her affections were still blindly yet firmly directing themselves.

Let it with all this, be said, that Pere Rouflet's only thought, upon realizing his condition, was one of repentance for the mortal sin he conceived himself committing. Those were days in which even Bishops and Cardinals made light of giving themselves up, as others around them did, to worldly love, imputing to themselves little fault for that; but to Pere Rouflet, brought up by necessity and inclination combined, in almost monastic seclusion, his state of feeling was as of one weighed down with burden of unpardonable sin. This, too, when he knew that his love must be all in vain, and, at the worst, must remain merely an error of the heart. Even at the most, he might simply dream of what might have been, and not of what

ever could be. There might have been one instant when, as his face was hidden between his outstretched hands, he looked far backward and in speculative wanderings of thought, wondered what might have happened had everything been other than it was? What if he had been layman rather than priest, and had been shapely and fitted for the conflict with the world, rather than uncouth and by nature retiring? And what if Manon had not ever seen the Knight, and the Knight had never chanced to take note of her? But the next moment, raising his head, Pere Rouflet saw no more the pleasant ideal picture;—only his stained and threadbare gown of ecclesiastic, binding him to solitary life as with iron fetters, the narrow window letting the light fall in upon sacred symbols, and through the half open door, the long aisle with the time-stained monuments and tablets, almost his only friends.

Then he roused himself and sought for action. So only might he quiet his troubled thoughts. Let him repress all vain imaginings, and devote himself to the duties of the moment; thereby, at the last, true peace might come. And that,—the sole duty of the hour, indeed,—was to act in such a way that the Knight might hold Manon no longer in living remembrance. Only thereby, could the misery hovering over all three be swept aside and baffled. He had told Manon that even were Sir Loys alive, it were her duty so to conduct herself that he would despise her rather than be tempted to renew his love. How now, in her ignorance that the Knight still lived,

could the Priest become her guardian and occupy her place and save her from herself? Already once, he had rejected the temptation to tell a false tale for Sir Loys' future composure and relief. But might there not be some subtle way discovered,—so with hair-splitting casuistry he reflected,—whereby the false story could be made to tell itself?

It might be that when Pere Rouflet sought his couch,—there for a while to toss to and fro in abject misery of heart,—his purpose already had its birth, though unrealized and undefined. But as the hours advanced, it took more distinct form upon itself; and when at last he fell asleep, its shapeliness continued still to grow. How or by what impulse or direction, could not be known. No bright visions came to calm his perturbed mind,—celestial faces had not looked down upon him with inspirations,—seraphic wings had not fluttered soothingly about him. But when he awoke, it was not to renewal of the conflict, but to cheerfulness, content and hope; and out of that deep, dreamless sleep had come the serenity of a well-formed purpose. The purpose of a new idea, coming with fresh life to his soul,—crowding out all his doubts and fears,—speaking of success in execution and certainty in result,—rousing him from desponding vacillation into instant energy of action.

The day was only slightly advanced,—the sun but a few minutes high,—the streets as yet almost deserted. The great porch-doors of the cathedral had not as yet

been thrown open, and Pere Rouflet was alone and undisturbed. With stealthy eagerness, he crept up beneath the picture of Sainte-Clotilde, mounted a few steps to bring himself to its level,—then, with brush and pallet in hand, made accurate preliminary scrutiny. A scrutiny which, with all its carefulness, lasted only for a minute; but even that was sufficient. Much study was not what now he needed; it was rather an inspiration of the moment that must most truly serve him. Not rigid, methodical calculation, indeed; but rather the impulse of a determined quickened perception. Dipping his brush into water-color,—for even in that state of exhilerated assurance he did not dare to risk undoing all his previous excellence of work by one false touch of oil,—he drew a single dotted shade along each curve of the figure's lips; then hastily descended from the spot and hurried a little down the nave, the better to note the result.

Nothing, it would seem;—or rather, nothing which would have been observable to any except an artist's eye. Upon almost any of the customary frequenters of the church, the figure would still smile as brightly and lovingly as ever. Even to himself, so familiar with the picture and knowing what he had done, at first there seemed no alteration in it. Yet as he gazed more critically, he could dimly see that something was wanting which had before been there,—some particle of the natural sweetness and benignity had now vanished,—there was a trifling diminu-

tion of the ineffable grace that had made the picture such a masterpiece. Would it be noticeable to any one else, indeed?

Waiting until the church-doors were opened, Pere Rouflet stood at one side and watched the few worshippers as they entered. One by one,—stealing gently in; nearly all advancing to the altar step, and there kneeling, with their eyes fixed upon the glowing picture. Clown and laborer in dingy blouse,—market woman leaving her basket half way down the aisle,—here and there a tradesman or artificer of fair degree;—so they approached and passed beneath his observant eyes. In all, he saw the reverent posture, the supplicating gaze; in none was there shadow of expression which might tell of wonder or confusion of mind or reveal any suspicion of perception that the painting was not as it had been from the very first. Could it be that he had been too sparing in his work,—that he had accomplished nothing, and had merely let his wishes deceive him into belief of any alteration being made at all?

Noon came; and with the sonorous stroke of the great belfry bell, Cecile entered. Pere Rouflet stood aloof and watched her with more critical attention than he had bestowed upon any of the others; for it was upon her more artistic perceptions that he relied most surely as test of success in his present plan. She, too, kneeling before the altar raised her eyes to the picture; but there was no flicker of expression to show that she read anything different from the others. His heart sank within him; and

abandoning his post of observation, he followed her into the studio and took up his accustomed task.

"And the Knight, my child,—has he changed for the right, again?"

"Sir Loys loves me no longer, Pere Rouflet. He is more kind in manner than ever before, it may be; yet it comes not from his heart."

Again her eyes filled with tears,—again an outburst of choking sobs. Once more Pere Rouflet strove to comfort her, only succeeding as the first violence of her grief became exhausted. He was disappointed, indeed, that she had not a better story to tell him; blaming himself, at the same time, for the feeling. For he knew that during the previous day no effect could have been produced by what he had done that very morning, since our works do not act in retrospect; and yet there had been in his heart a foolish instinct of hope that some change might have already come. Therefore while comforting her, he could not altogether reason away his own disappointment; feeling, at the same time, a fear that he might have been too negligent and sparing in his work.

But when she had dried her eyes and finished her sitting, and pulling her veil closely about her face had stolen homeward through the little side door, and Pere Rouflet, coming forth into the body of the church, saw the Knight standing motionless before the picture, he thought that he detected in his gaze a faint gleam of perplexity. The earnest look of regretful love was, perhaps, there all the

same, but mingled with it was an almost indefinable impress of uncertainty and wonderment. As upon the previous day, Pere Rouflet stole softly forward, hoping that when he had gained the other's notice, there might ensue some conversation about the picture and thereby afford an index to the real suggestions of the heart. But as he approached, the Knight moved away, and in a moment more strode down the nave; and with that, the opportunity for present converse was lost.

But the next morning, the Knight was there once again; and on his face the same faint impress of perplexity. This time he could no longer resist some manifestation of his state of thought, and said:

"It is a bright warm day, Pere Rouflet; and therefore it may be that it is not the proper time to give lustre or adornment to these your works. Tell me, now; does not such a clear sunshiny morn as this cause injury to their effect,—bringing out, perchance, into some evident observation, those unavoidable blemishes that, in a gloomy atmosphere might not be seen?"

Pere Rouflet shook his head.

"It is not so, Sir Knight," he made response. "If there be any difference at all, it lies in this: that in this clearer light, whatever beauties of expression there may chance to be are made more manifest, while ordinary blemishes are lost in the increased brilliancy of the whole."

"True,—true; it must, of a certainty be so," Sir Loys

muttered; and with that, once more he strode away, a shade of disappointment resting upon his face, as from the influence of a hope unfulfilled and a mystery unexplained. And so far, Pere Rouflet felt that all was going well; more especially as, upon the following morning, Cecile appeared with something of her pallor gone and a brightening expression upon her face.

"Not that as yet I am altogether happy, Pere Rouflet. Not that I can feel assured he loves me again, as once he did. But it seems as though this morning he spoke to me more from the real warmth of his heart, and I felt that his eyes rested upon me with something of the olden fondness. Yet it may again all pass away."

"Perchance,—or it may increase. The last is as easy to conceive of as the first. Why, therefore, look upon the darkened side and anticipate trouble?"

That day the Knight seemed as he had been the day before,—troubled and perplexed, yet avoiding much converse. So for a week, during which Pere Rouflet dared not press further in his scheme, lest by too suddenly attempting much, he might undo all. But at the expiration of the week, once more at early dawn he mounted to the level of the painting, with palette and brush in hand. This time he did not touch the lips, but placed two minute spots of color upon the corners of the eyes. Some subtle instinct seemed to guide his hand aright; for when he surveyed his work from the centre of the nave, he saw that though the actual likeness still stood un-

impaired, something was gone. It was something that in part had given to the picture its chiefest charm,—it was the sweet love lit serenity that had beamed so lustrously from the eyes and helped shed a saintlike expression upon the whole countenance. That impress was now obliterated; and though the original brightness of the eyes remained, it was stamped with a certain cold, repellant, unsympathetic gaze.

Still, to the common observation, there was the same likeness as before; and as again Pere Rouflet stood and watched the worshippers file in, he saw that there was not in one face any conscious perception of a change. But now, at last, he no longer felt oppressed with doubt of his success; he knew that upon the coming of him for whom it was all intended, the great purpose would be found fulfilled. And so it proved, indeed. When the sitting in the studio closed, the Knight was at his post; but mingled with his perplexity and doubt, there was an expression bordering upon dismay. Now, indeed, did it seem that he could not avoid speaking to Pere Rouflet, even though he might not otherwise have wished to do so. Rather did he seek his notice, seizing him impulsively by the arm and leading him abruptly forward.

"Is this a dream, Pere Rouflet, or am I the sport of a fiend?" he cried. "Or else,—— Tell me; was that painting yonder, a true likeness of her whom you took as your model for it?"

"A true and faithful likeness, Sir Knight. Not one

feature portrayed amiss, nor expression of grace left unsupplied."

"And of a surety, it must still be the same. Has my eye, therefore, lost its full power of perception, or has my heart— Tell me this, also. You know the springs of the human mind, for you have listened to many a tale of heartfelt struggle, and it is your vocation to probe every emotion to the core, seeking the true origin of its disease. You are artist, as well,—perchance more artist than priest; and must have learned how at different times, the pictured canvas may variously affect the same person, —in proportion, it may be, as the mind feels predisposed to receive diverse impressions."

"Well, Sir Knight?"

"Let me know this, indeed. At one time,—I ask this not as relating to myself, you will understand, but merely as a curious, subtle question now happening to engage my speculative faculties,—at one time, I see the portrait of one whom I have once known, and I find it replete with every grace and beauty as well as excellence of refinement. It sheds upon me a glow as of celestial love, and I seem to bask in a sunshine of happy memories. Another time I once more see the portrait, and I find it different. It is, of a certainty, in all respects the same; yet it now seems to me vastly changed. The sunshine has gone out of it,—the grace and winsome loveliness have disappeared,—there remain, indeed, the form and feature and attitude,—in all, the mere shell of

beauty ;—but the vivifying soul is there no longer. Coldness has taken the place of warmth,—a keen, searching gaze replaces the accustomed gentle look of confiding, trusting affection."

"And what then, Sir Knight ?"

"This,—this is what I would fain know. As I have said already, the change is not in the picture. That cannot alter. It must therefore be in myself. But in what does this change consist ? Is it that I am falling away in all true friendship from that one whom I knew, —letting the selfishness and corruption of the world engender in me a base degeneracy of regard, so that I am inclined to magnify the slightest failings into faults, and look upon my friend with treacherous indifference ? Or, on the other hand, is it that I have heretofore been the victim of some false glamor that has warped my judgment, turned my heart astray from what is right, and led me to believe in excellences which did not at all exist ; and that now, with clearer brain, I awaken to the truth as it has always been ?"

"How can I tell, Sir Knight ?" Pere Rouflet answered, moved with strong emotion. "It may be the one thing, —it may be the other,—it may be compound of both. To each man, surely, the truest knowledge of his own heart."

"Yes, to each one the best knowledge of himself," was the somewhat wrathful response, "even though that be not true priestly doctrine. To each one, judgment

of his own heart; but why not, then, of conscience as well? I were a fool, indeed, to ask another about what I could so well determine for myself. Priest and artist combined,—how can even they help me, as long as I have a brain of my own with which to fathom the darkness?"

With that, he turned and went clanging down the nave, leaving Pere Rouflet distressed and saddened. Who was he himself, indeed,—so came the thought,—that he should have the right to bring this trouble upon another, even though it might be for honest purpose? Yet he had his reward, when, upon the following day, he saw Cecile appear. Her face already seemed to have grown rounder and replete with a deeper glow,—her eyes shone more brightly, and there was even suggestion of the olden smile upon her features.

"For he is loving me once more," she said, when Pere Rouflet commended the improvement in her. "Not yet as before, it may be, good Pere; but it is surely coming back to me, all the same. Already does it seem to me that the violence of his estrangement is passing off, and that before long he will return to me as true as ever. Why then should I not smile and show rounded cheeks? And with his restored love, why need I fear the wiles and plans of King, or Grand Duke of Mantua, or the whole Court together, in attempt to change my destiny?"

Why, indeed? And now, seizing the propitious moment, Pere Rouflet sought and not with ill success to transfer more propitiously to her portrait, through the aid

of her re-awakened beauty, those graces of thought and spirit which heretofore he had failed to catch. Passing a week thereat in well sustained and successful labor; toiling more diligently indeed, than ever before, inasmuch as throughout all, he bore with him that overshadowing dread of mishap and consequent perception that there should be no more needless delay.

At last—as sooner or later all things that are so intended will come—the day arrived in which the portrait stood completed. Then Pere Rouflet, seeing no way in which by any final touch he could still make improvement in it, fastened the little vellum square in silver casing cunningly elaborated with ornamentations of its own, and placed it in Cecile's hand. Then he stood silently by, while she opened it before him. She had not yet seen any of the work, since from the first he had kept it from her gaze, lest she might look upon it in its incompleteness, and so not approving it, carry her prejudices to the end. Would she now like it?

How, indeed, could she withhold approval? For, from her power of beauty aroused and enlivening every feature beneath the influence of her new found assurances of happiness, Pere Rouflet had been enabled now as never before, to redeem his recent failure and fix upon the vellum those richer traits of intelligence and soul which the most exact copy of mere tint or feature will not portray. Nay, more; he had hoped, at the most, to paint successfully the picture of a beautiful woman, with such qualities of

grace as most especially belong to her; and lo! he had unwittingly transfered to that small portraiture, those manifestions of a living soul which he had blotted out from the broad glass above. Yet was the likeness not impaired. And as Pere Rouflet stood by, clearly now he saw the great result he had achieved. Even as by critical manipulation of the larger picture he had divested it of those beautiful attributes which had most truly graced it, so, in the contemplation of this lesser work, he had imparted to it qualities which it did not rightfully possess, but which none the less added to its lifelike beauty.

"And this is my face, dear Pere Rouflet?" she cried, after a moment of enraptured scrutiny. "Nay, it cannot be. It is an angel's face rather than the face of mortal woman. The Sainte-Clotilde your triumph? Not so; for it is this alone which, could it be known as well, should carry your name down to fame and honor. Surely the great Leonardo da Vinci himself would say the same. Ah, Pere Rouflet, were Sir Loys' fealty not already almost restored to me, how could it fail to return, when he shall see this token of my own true love for him, with all this depth of passion and every quality of grace here pictured to the eye, as his destined bride's own likeness and embodiment?"

CHAPTER IX.

MAKING her final leave of Pere Rouflet, and holding the little painting carefully and lovingly concealed in her bosom, guarding it there as a most precious jewel, Cecile passed from the church and took up her homeward route. And it so chanced that as she left the door, a small slight figure in coarse gown and with gray hood drawn half across the face came from the opposite direction, and meeting her, slowly crept by towards the church. The figure of a poorly clad and meekly-retiring woman, of whom the fair maid-of-honor would not naturally have taken note, or seeing whom would not have given to her a second thought. But now it chanced that, as the two passed, the gray hood happened to fall back disclosing the whole face ; and in its re-adjustment Manon's eyes were raised and for the moment fastened upon the upper portion of the great tower. This uplifted direction of the gaze gave impress of devotion to the entire countenance ; and seeing it, Cecile paused for a moment and wondered when and where she had already met such features and expression.

The gray hood was almost instantly drawn back into place, and Manon slowly passed on towards the church, noting not the neighborhood of the fair Cecile nor the inquiring gaze fixed steadily upon herself. Seeing not how Cecile, after an instant of uncertain, troubled reflection, started with the force of a new perception, and in assurance that by the light of those uplifted eyes she recognized the original of that gloriously depicted face upon the great apse-window. Observing not how, as she herself crept onward, the figure of the beautiful maiden of the Court stood for a moment irresolute, watching her every step and movement, and striving to catch one more glance at the covered face, so as more fully to satisfy herself that her suspicions of identity were not misplaced. Noting not how at the last, Cecile seemed to become well convinced, and with one parting glance of keen inquiry, turned once more away and pursued her homeward route without further attempt at scrutiny. All this Manon did not see ; walking as she did with her gaze again bent towards the ground, and with no reason to suspect that her movements should ever have been watched by any one. But not so with Pere Rouflet, who, ever on the alert with dread of Manon's recognition, now read aright and with distinctness every motion and expression of the maid-of-honor, and felt his heart sink within him, with apprehension of evil. It might be of little consequence, perhaps, that Cecile should discern the identity of Manon with the picture of the Sainte-Clotilde ; but what if

through her, in some lover-like confidence, the Knight should learn that Manon was still living?

"Why have you come hither?" Pere Rouflet cried, impulsively turning towards her as she closed the little door. He spoke not roughly, indeed, but with certain tone of impatience unusual with himself, so greatly was his spirit agitated with sudden dread of evil consequences. And what if Manon already knew all, and had now come hither to announce some new wish—to tell him, it might be, that she had discovered the whole secret, and would forego her late intent to retire from the world?

She on her part, innocent of any glimmer of the truth or expectation of change, heard his hurried salutation with dismay. She had as usual sunk into the great carved chair, and there half buried from sight by its expanding arms had earnestly lifted her eyes to his, awaiting the expected pleasant greeting. For months it had been her wont to look for little other kindly welcome in the world than his. For there were so few persons whom she knew; and these could have little sympathy for her heart's longings, and, having no knowledge of her history, could not talk with her as could Pere Rouflet. But with him it was so different. That little room cut off from the great nave of the cathedral had become through long association even as a home to her, a refuge from much cruel thought, and Pere Rouflet was her best and most faithful friend. He knew her life, her past regrets, and her need of sympathy; and through his counsels she could often find

comfort when the best attractions of the outer world only made her soul weary. More than all this, she had felt at times that her own poor powers of responsive sympathy were not unpleasing to him. All their talk was not about the past or concerning struggles of the heart. At times, surprising him at his labor with the brush and pallet, she could lean over and commend or make suggestion ; finding, even in her own uncultivated taste some quality of criticism that might prove of value to him. Under her observant and interested eye, the Saint Jerome had gradually grown into a more perfect and majestic beauty than it might have had with her assistance withheld ; and when in lighter moments, Pere Rouflet would sometimes betake himself again to small matters of parchment illumination, it was Manon's taste that had often given grace to what otherwise would have been stiffly severe. Such companionship as this had not been without its effect in turning priest and penitent into trusting friends ; and to her as well as to Cecile he had loved to tell the traditions of the old church and explain the growth of its intricate architecture ; so that gradually it came to pass that the place seemed to mould both of them into some form of character suited to its own spirit, and she as well as he took tranquil enjoyment in its traditions and shadows. All this could not but tend to make her coming very precious to Pere Rouflet ; and never before this, for many months past, had she failed to see how, at sight of her, the pleasant smile of welcome spread luminously upon

his poor saddened face, and his bent figure seemed to grow alert with the energy of a more cheery life. But now—

"Why is it that I am here?" she responded. Her awakened anticipative smile faded slowly away, her head and arms drooped supinely, her whole figure seemed to shrink into still smaller proportions. "I thought, Pere Rouflet—it seemed to me indeed that, inasmuch as I must so soon renounce the world—there are but three days now left me—it were not unbecoming that I should come and tell you all that I have lately done in bidding it farewell."

"And rightly so, Manon," he responded feelingly, his heart at once released from apprehension by her words. No—it was impossible that she could have heard. "Rightly so, Manon. Did I speak hastily or roughly in giving you greeting? I meant it not. I was troubled for the moment with other matters, far away from ourselves, indeed; and hardly for the instant did I realize your coming. Let me sit here now and listen, as I have been wont."

He drew his own chair more closely in front of her, so that he could gaze down intently into her brown eyes, often through long practice reading there her story before the words really came to her lips. And now, as with his great dread of discovery once more cast aside he was enabled to gather the wonted expression of welcome again upon his face, so did her own crushed heart rebound with pleasure; and she told the story of her

farewell to earth, and spoke of the days of her approaching seclusion from the world with as cheery a tone as though she were anticipating gladsome festival and revelry.

"A little farewell to earth and to all its outer ties, Pere Rouflet—into this have I been entering. For I must not leave the world too abruptly or disdainfully. There were those few persons, as I have said before, whom I had been wont to visit in their sickness and who had learned to look with pleasure upon my coming. To these, surely, I must say good bye."

"And rightfully indeed, Manon."

"First then, was the poor girl whom so long I had been helping to nurse through her fever. About the doorway there was now, as heretofore, a cluster of young student friends;—a wild and roisterous set, as we all know, giving themselves privileges denied to simple citizens and always turbulent with demands for more,—a noisy body, full of rough frolic, and not at all times respectful to the passer by; and yet, Pere Rouflet, not altogether unrestrained or violent. For when I came into view, and they recognized my gray hood and possibly the kindly disposition of my face beneath it, their loud jests were hushed into silence, and they fell quietly back on either hand to let me pass in, with a deep respect as though I were His Grace the Archbishop.

"'You will find Marie much better,' one of them said to me.

"So I passed through into the narrow hall, and thence into almost as narrow a room; where, upon a small cot, the sick girl lay. At a glance I saw that the fever had left her, and in the collected power of her bright eyes I read renewed life and strength. Beside the cot sat a student tending her; a wild young fellow as any of those outside, to all appearance; but here, tender, solicitous and true.

"'She will now get well;' he said. 'And it might not have been so, but for your good care in the past.'

"'And he,—lean over and listen to me,' the girl whispered, blushing. 'He says,—doth Jacque,—that when I am completely restored he will marry me. What think you of that, for pleasant tidings? Is he not good?'

"'God also is good who has put it into his heart to do you that justice,' I said, smoothing down her hair. 'And when I am gone, never to return, and you are happy, as I know you will be in his good and brave affection, you will sometimes think of me?'

"It was the farewell, Pere Rouflet, that I had promised myself; and when I spoke, how could I help feeling pleased to find how greatly I seemed beloved by all? For this young girl wept sorely at hearing that this must be the last, and the student-crowd pressed tumultuously around with farewells almost as tearful as her own, and swore a little after their rough manner, and said I must not go, but that—and doubtless for the moment they meant it—they would muster all the students into one mass and tear down the ill-omened convent to take me out again. And

so, with much wild but earnest token of attachment, I passed from their midst and was no longer seen by them."

"It is a pleasant thing, indeed, to be so greatly cherished, were it only for a day," Pere Rouflet said. "And after that—"

"Thence, Pere Rouflet, down into a close ill-savored place beneath the ground, where no one ought ever to be forced to stay; but where until now, had lived a little child whose true home should have been where green fields and running waters could be found. Living there no longer, indeed; for when I entered, I saw in place of the little arms extended towards me, only a motionless form upon a table in the centre. Holy Church had already been there, and had placed candles at the head and feet. Near by sat father and mother, both dull and sodden in uncouth and partially drunken brutishness, remaining motionless with only half comprehended perception of something unusual having happened, but neither of them able intelligently to realize their loss.

"'This morning,—before we were awake,' whimpered the woman, making feeble motionings with her hand towards the little body.

"Leaning over, I kissed the still smiling lips of the child, pulled my hood more closely across my face to hide the tears I could not keep back, and ascended to the street. That was there my sole farewell; for what need to tell my new intent to those brutish parents who could not comprehend me, or if perchance they did, would not

miss my coming in the future? To the child alone, who had so much loved me, must be my good by."

"You are right indeed, Manon. To the child alone."

"Then, Pere Rouflet, through a tangle of narrow streets to a tall building upon a dark corner. There I climbed the stairs into the fourth story,—it is becoming a hard task for me to climb so far,—and then knocked at a door, which was at once opened to me. It was to visit Barbloche the wounded man-at-arms that I had come, and I had expected to find him still helpless upon his couch. But men are not like poor weak girls, to lie long in bed moaning over their hurts. It was a sharp cut that Barbloche had received, and possibly not unjustly, seeing that he is over quarrelsome by nature, and a King's guardsman had done him that injury in pure defense. Be that as it may, the hurt was given to a rugged frame, and the wound had healed more quickly than might have been supposed, and it was Barbloche himself that opened the door to me.

"'You are welcome,—ever welcome, little Manon,' he said. For so, in his rough fondness, he had become accustomed to call me. 'And but for expecting you, I know not but that I should have been away before this, in search of a master, and of brave adventure with him. But you know that I could not go and not say good bye to my faithful little nurse.'

"'No, Barbloche, nor could I so part from you,' I said. 'I have been ill; and though at times abroad, have not at

all seasons been able to mount these stairs so far. And I thought I should find you still in need of much more nursing.'

"At that he smiled somewhat disdainfully, and twisted his tangled beard awry, as he sought proper reply.

"'Pah!' he said. 'When the skin unites again, why should Barbloche not consider himself all right? I remember, little Manon, that once at siege of castle in the Flanders country, I was struck on the head by a stone from a catapult and knocked senseless as a log, and truly it was thought my poor brains were out. Yet for all that, I was about as usual the very next day; and the day after that, was among the first to enter the castle and share the plunder. A man-at-arms has a cat's life; and what more than that can be said?'

"'Since that is so, give God the glory of it, good Barbloche,' I said.

"'Yes; if I chance to find time for priestly thoughts. And you,—you have been ill, you say? Stand now to the light and let me look at you a little closer. Careless as I am, my mind misgives me about you.'

"Thereupon, with kindly yet powerful grasp that would brook no denial, he moved me in front of the window where the sunlight might fall upon me. Thus disposed, and in that full glare, even his unobservant nature could not fail to read aright the adverse signs placed by sickness upon me. My hollowed cheeks,—my wasted arm peeping from beneath the sleeve now all too broad for it,—these

surely are indications that even a child might understand, I think. He drew his hand across his eyes, and coughed once or twice.

"'There is smoke in the room,' he muttered. 'Well, child, you say truly; you are not well. And yet you might be made better if you would go the right way about it. What do you purpose doing?'

"'First, Barbloche, to say farewell to you.'

"With that he burst out into loud campaigning oath.

"'Nay, that you shall never do,' he exclaimed. 'What! shall there, then, be no such thing as gratitude known in all the world? Because I am strong again, should that be reason why I must never see you more? It may be that you must go hence and nurse others, as you have taken care of me; but for all that, must I never hereafter know anything about your coming and your going? And this, when I owe you so much? For know that I was jesting when I spoke about my wound being such a trifle. However well it may now be healed, it was deep and broad at the time of it; and but for you, I should now be sped, I think. But let me hear further. You spoke about farewell, to which of a certainty I could never assent. What further?'

"'I said farewell, Barbloche, seeing that it must needs be so. In three days, I leave the world to enter into convent; where—'

"'Where you would die within a month,' he interrupted. 'You that need so much the fresh air and the sunlight, even as any one else needs food, to shut yourself between

walls and to patter aves and credos and no longer to look out upon the good world, or those in it who have gained from you so much of their own sunshine and must perforce at times still wish to look upon you. Now, listen to me, little Manon.'

"'Well, Barbloche,' I said.

"'There are now sewn up in this very doublet of mine,' he continued, 'twelve broad gold pieces, doubloons of Spain. It is no great fortune, to be sure; but they would last for a few months if carefully expended, and that is sufficient for your behest. If spent by myself alone, they would but last a week or so, seeing that they would disappear in drink and all wild revelry; but if spent by both of us and more especially for your sake, they would suffice for many times that length, it being then the case that I would not drink a drop, so as to save the gold more carefully for your needs. Go now with me; and I, treating you like a child of my own and with all reverence and respect, will take you to some mountain nook where you shall taste the fresh air and gather new health. What say you? It will not be for yourself alone, but for myself as well. Should I not do a prudent thing, in saving my good nurse for myself? It might be that before long, I shall get another sword-thrust or probing with lance; and then, who else than yourself to cure me again? So you see, I am like the rest of the world and very selfish at heart, after all.'

"So he spoke, dear Pere Rouflet, trying to conceal the

generosity of his purpose beneath mere appearance of self-interest."

"And you, Manon,—what did you say to that?" Pere Rouflet demanded, startled into sudden alarm.

"Nay, what could I say other than I did? I told him it could not,—must not be. That my word was otherwise pledged, and that I must not break away from it. That the retirement into the convent was no sudden unreflecting resolve of mine, but one that had ripened in my mind with much deep consideration, and that I knew it had led me to my true vocation. That if ever it need be, some other one not less tender and true would nurse him in my stead; and doubtless as well as I had done, would help keep his generous heart alive in his brave breast. This I told him;—but oh! Pere Rouflet."

"Speak on, Manon." And he felt his face flush with new apprehension. Her words of refusal seemed scarcely a refusal at all, such a longing, regretful tone lingered in that last exclamation.

"What indeed can I say but this? If I had not already given so solemnly my word,—or if I had strength remaining to engage in some newer, brighter life than that I have for so long known,—or if there were any chance that a different life, even if bringing health to my worn body might give hope unto my heart,—Oh, dear friend! it was a sore trial, indeed, for me to refuse. I had not always lived in cities. I had at times breathed the air of the open fields: but I had never been upon the mountains. I had

once seen them from a distance, and even then had felt a longing for near acquaintance with their sunny slopes and cooling shades. To think that now, at this last day, the offer of that great joy had come to me, and that I must put it all away! Why, at the very thought of what was now within my reach, the blood flowed faster through my veins and new health seemed to abound within me. How then, if I were actually to stand far up where the fresh breezes—"

"It was no satisfying, healthful longing that you felt!" cried Pere Rouflet, in increasing vehemence of alarm. "It was the cruel tempting of the fiend! Have I not already warned you against him? Yield not, Manon; nor even think that you have come near yielding, but with all your strong resolution, beat him down, lest haply he betray you in the end!"

"I know not,—I know not, indeed, Pere Rouflet, whether or no it may be as you say. I am loth to think that any fiend could rest in the generous soul of Barbloche, to cause through him that subtle temptation of myself. Rather in my own heart must have lurked the tempter, whispering to me for my soul's hurt, that I should not regret a boon that in itself was purely intended. But be of ease. I have driven off the tempter, be he fiend or only the impulse of my own evil inclination. And doing so, I have not done injustice to my strength of purpose. For it was not merely the thought of sunlit slopes and cooling breezes that in the end I learned I must resist. There is more than that for me to tell, dear Pere Rouflet."

CHAPTER X.

ONCE more Pere Rouflet sank back supinely in his seat; and it seemed to him as though now his face was flushed with deeper tinge of apprehension than at any time before. Was it ever to be thus, that each moment of enforced quietude of soul should be succeeded by some scarcely defined, yet none the less startling terror? Was it then a real thing,—that instinct which, when Manon first entered, had whispered to him that she came with evil tidings? If it were indeed so, let him now know it without further delay. And he sat gazing into her face—moving not and uttering no unneedful word, lest by distracting her thoughts he might hinder what he must needs hear to the very end.

"There is more to come?" he merely said. "Then speak."

She, upon her part sat gazing down into her lap, seeming now reluctant, though having advanced so far, to go onward to the end. For a moment she remained silent, listlessly toying with her fingers, hesitating how to clothe her thoughts with words, or whether she should not even

now forbear further confession. Then at last she began, but slowly and with desultory movement, as though she would still protract her story and give herself time to withhold it altogether. With something of that purpose, perhaps,—the intent to gain a minute or two more of thought,—she plunged not suddenly into her narration, but began far back, leading gently up towards it.

"Therefore it was I accepted not the offer of good Barbloche," she said. "But I told him that if he wished to make me think of him with pleasure when I was gone—

"'Speak on, little Manon,' he said.

"'It is this,' I responded. 'Why must you be man-at-arms at all? Why be ever putting yourself where thrust of sword or probe of spear thus endangers the life?'

"'Surely the King and France must have soldiers,' he said.

"'Yes, Barbloche, the King and France—and let it be for defence alone. But you have not served only these. You have been soldier of fortune, and at times have sold your service to other lands and princes, and have even waged wrongful war over much of Europe under command of Freebooter Captains. This, surely, is not the true career for such a generously minded man as yourself? Undue blood and carnage should not be the pastime of your life?'

"'It may be true as you say,' he responded, looking down. 'It may be well to wage war in defence of King and country and not for other leaders. Many a time have

I bestowed hard knocks upon heads that I had never before seen, and that belonged not to enemies of mine. Indeed, it seems strange to be so blindly led into the field as to be forced to put out the life of one who, at any other time, might have proved good comrade at a tavern revel. Yet what would you have? So goes the world. And if princes and knights of high degree who, when at home, consort with cardinals and bishops, do not learn their duty better, what can one expect from a simple man-at-arms who is not supposed to think at all, and who for priest sees only wayside shaveling, and has no castle or tenants of his own to give him fair support; and if he ever has a gold-piece to spend upon his pleasures, must first take it from the pouch of some one else, of whom, for such purpose, he has made himself an enemy?' And what answer could I make to all that, Pere Rouflet?"

"I know not,—it is the way of the world, that is all," Pere Rouflet responded moodily, certainly not now disposed to enter into argument about questions which might never at any time have suggested themselves to him. "And what then? Go on now, to the end."

"'Therefore you see, little Manon,' Barbloche continued, 'how closely a man is encompassed by the circumstances in which he is born and how difficult it must be to wander away from them. All that I could do for you, I would. If it would make you any happier in your convent life,—since you will insist upon going thither,—that I should drink less and never cut down a man without

being able to show good reason for it, why be it so. To this I might add, if so it seems proper to you, that at times I will give a piece of gold to Holy Church as alms, and myself mutter an 'Ave' when going into affray or battle. What more than that can I be expected to do? It seems so easy for you, who have never suffered any temptation in life or known what it is to depart from what your missal or breviary enjoins upon you,—so easy, I say, to turn aside into the ways of a quiet life. But if you only knew—'

"'Nay, Barbloche, my friend,' I interrupted, 'do I not know it all? You believe that only this straight and guiltless manner of life has ever been before me. Learn, therefore,—and I tell you this only for your own instruction, as showing what others have done,—learn that I too have known temptation,—that I am now working out my redemption for the bitter past,—that it has been no more easy for me to turn aside and tread in a new path of life than it would be for you.'

"'Not altogether so, indeed, little Manon,' he said. 'To women there is at least, the new path laid out and ready to be trodden, if so be they have the will and resolution to go therein. Else, what are convents for,—and advice of priests given to them more readily than to us,—and good works around Holy Church that only women may attempt? But as for us men-at-arms—— Listen! I had a comrade once, who did as you would advise,—abandoned practice of arms and thought to live only by

peaceful pursuits. Even as I would have done in such case, he wasted all his substance, then nearly starved, then took to robbing on the King's highway for a living. A tolerable profession, after all, even that may be, if well conducted; only that he made mistake and robbed an Archbishop, thinking that it was some one else, and was broken upon the wheel the day thereafter. Whether was that better than a sound blow from battle-axe or mace that can be felt but once?'

"'But still, Barbloche—'

"'Nay, nay, good little Manon, shake not your head. The world is made so, and we cannot help it. To me there can be no other pursuit than that of arms, seeing that I have been brought up to it and know no other. A poor end must come of it, you will say? Why, so it will be, of course; death not in the soft bed, as priests and traders die, but on the bare earth and by hard knocks or thrusts of steel. What then? All men must die at the last, and scarcely does it matter when or how, so long as it be honorable. Therefore let the merry game of life go round in the same old fashion, and each one abide in his own place for which he has been intended. Soon will I be in the field again, sacking castles and what not, if it may chance that I can find some valiant and enterprising captain to engage my services. One I have in my mind under whom I served in Italy; other than whom were he now alive—'"

"You are coming to it now," Pere Rouflet muttered, scarcely above his breath.

"Yes, Pere Rouflet, I am coming to it now, as you perceive. 'Other than whom, were he now alive'—so said Barbloche, 'I would not look at. A title his, when at Court, little Manon; but with us he was only the brave Captain Loys de Martelle. Left dying on the field in Italy——' Oh, Pere Rouflet!" continued Manon looking up wildly and despairingly, wringing her hands the while. "Can you not see it all,—why at the end, I was more sorely tempted than I had ever been before? Not now merely the picturings of bright sunshine and the cooling shades of the mountain ranges to stimulate me! But beyond and better than all that, to have the kind Barbloche at my side to tell me about Loys! In what knightly manner he had ever borne himself, though of that we must even now feel well assured! How he looked and thought; and how at some time he may have given utterance to a secret memory, and that memory have chanced to be about poor, hapless Manon! How in his sleep he may have called my name, showing that in his heart there was no relinquishment of me! How that in some moment of a full heart's outpouring,—such as might well happen during period of loneliness, so that he would be moved to confidence even in the rough man-at-arms riding at his side,—he may have spoken about the past and given utterance to one bright story in his past life; not mentioning my name, perhaps, but leaving it to be inferred that there was one whom he had loved and who had deserted him with seeming heartlessness, yet whom he freely forgave! How that—"

"Enough! Enough of all this!" cried Pere Rouflet, rising from his chair in sudden access of jealous indignation. "Have I not said, long ago and often, that such thoughts and memories as these must be forever put away from out your heart? Is it your part in life any longer to let your mind weave itself around past scenes, seeing that all your care must now be to fit yourself for Heaven, forsaking, therefor, every earthly tie or even recollection of any such? No more of such vain repinings and regrets—no more!"

Speaking thus, and with unaccustomed passion of vehemence, he strode to the further end of the room; then turning, saw that she too had arisen, and that now she stood gazing upon him, her whole face kindling with every expression of indignation. Once more, indeed, it had happened that, with cruel power of tyranny, he had ventured to order too rudely her unquestioning obedience. Once more, forgetting that there yet remained matters upon which she could claim a will of her own, he had let himself be roused into injustice and thereby brought upon him her swift rebuke and rebellion.

"Surely you are exacting and unfair!" she said, clinging to the tall chair for better support, her whole frame seeming to dilate into unaccustomed strength, while she poured forth her indignant protest. "You would take away the very little of life that remains to me, secluding me not merely from the world's joys, but even from any pleasant recollection of the world! Surely the good

God himself could scarcely exact such sacrifice as that! If so, who is there who could hope to be free from sin? Is it not something that there should be the will to abjure? Must it be called of none effect without the power also to forget? Do you think that even in the convent itself there are no hearts silently breaking with vain and hopeless regrets, even while the fingers seem most busily employed fashioning the altar's lace? If so, then can I not be fitted to join that company of the elect, seeing that I could never hope to leave my memories of the world all outside the grated porch."

And once more, as before, Pere Rouflet saw that he had gone too far, and sank powerless and baffled beneath her indignation. To himself was now the subjection of spirit as he listened to her impetuous speech; to her the victory.

"I have done wrong, perhaps, in that I have sought too closely to restrain you," he said, returning to his place in front of her. "And yet, Manon, I meant it all for good."

"It may be so,—it may be so, Pere Rouflet," she rejoined. "It may be only your ignorance of the heart that has led you into such spirit of exaction. I will not say that it is not. But this I must maintain, that if I surrender my whole power of action, my thoughts must still go free to wander where they list. Be it in your eyes a sin or not, never will I think it wrong to cherish my loving memories of Loys de Martelle. Shall I tell you what I did two nights ago? I passed the convent

where, as you must remember, once I stood outside the grating with my hand upstretched seeming there to feel some instinctive perception of Loys, as though his spirit were hovering near me. And the thought came to me to try whether in similar circumstance that feeling would come to me once more."

"Well, Manon?"

"I raised my hand, until it touched the great brazen bar, and I bowed my head and waited. The darkness was all around me, there was no one near to interrupt me, there was nothing to hinder me from hearing any whisper from the spirit world. But this time, all was still, unchanging and desolate. There came nothing of that former instinct of neighborhood of the dead, that had partly affrighted me, but much the more had comforted me. All now was loneliness and desolation."

"It was as it should have been," cried Pere Rouflet, his face brightening into serenity, from his momentary fear of new complications. "Did I not heretofore tell you aright, when I said that it was the foul fiend coming to instil vain longings into your soul and steal away your peace? But at last he has left you,—so far at least you have conquered.—Ah, Manon," he continued, more with the air of suppliant before her, than of spiritual father giving counsel, "believe now that you have only to go on and perfect the good work of your recovery and renewed peace of mind. A few years seclusion from the world,—what is it? What value do I put upon

the world,—I who can go hither and thither in it and yet prefer this solitude and refuge from its wickedness and cares? And if not I, why should you dread retirement from it? Its wickedness and care, did I say? The latter might easily be borne, indeed. But for the former, —the turmoil and bloodshed, the lust and robbery, the avarice and blasphemy,—how can you truly estimate the wickedness of the world it is your privilege to flee from, or rightly compass its power? Not merely in far-off places where crime can run rampant in defiance of the law, but even here, beneath the very shadow of Holy Church. Look around even now, Manon, and see for yourself what is this world that you can so easily desert."

With that he drew her to the window and threw it open, so that they could gaze outside, unfettered by the small colored panes. And as they stood side by side and gazed without, giving more heed perhaps to what was spread out before them than ever before, this was what at first they saw.

The cathedral stood upon a little paved square, the larger portion of which could be seen from the open window in the studio. At one side of the square ran a close high stone wall, broken only in the centre by a heavily ironed gate-way, and rising at the further end into a scarcely higher building, almost as blank and windowless as the wall itself. Within were courtyard and garden, plainly denoted by the branches and tree-tops trimmed into artificial regularity and projected against the sky.

This building and enclosure were the convent into which Manon was to ask admittance. Upon the other side of the square was a line of little shops, dreary and discordant in appearance. One was a drinking shop, before which at that very moment a group of men were quarrelling. Another was an armorer's workshop, and from it came the sullen discordant clang of beaten iron. At the front were arranged hideous weapons of warfare,—two-handed swords and roughly knobbed maces and weighty battle-axes, and among them steel corslets, gauntlets and helmets—some of them new and brightly burnished, and one or two displaying savage dents, in token of the rough usage they could endure without succumbing. At the further end, the square narrowing into a close street—so close, indeed, as to be a mere lane, bordered by tall houses of ruinous aspect, leaning at certain points so nearly across, that it seemed as though they would soon meet and shut out even the little sunlight that there belonged. A street which spoke not of ease and affluence and home-joys, but rather of disease and filth and poverty, and also gave suggestions of past siege in which a squalid, reckless population might nurse their misery into demoniac hate and pour down molten lead upon invading force below. In the midst of the square itself, a great stone scaffold where stood the public pillory, and where, doubtless, execution to the death had often been done, with cruel torture. Above all, a thick vail of clouds, shutting out the rich sunlight and throw-

ing gloom upon the spirits even of such as might struggle to be cheerful.

"Look at the scene before you, Manon," Pere Rouflet said. "And what other thing, even in the shadow of this church, do you see except sin and suffering? Guilt and poverty and wretchedness,—anger and bickering,—every trade devoted to the maiming of men's bodies, or to the destruction of their souls,—amid all, dreadful engines for the punishment of crime; the only pleasant feature of it all, that part upon the right where the leafy trees wave above the convent walls, and overshadow with protecting arms the peace and quietude and innocence of those within."

But it happened that even while Pere Rouflet was speaking, a gleam of sunlight managed to pierce through a broken rift of cloud; and almost at once widening from its first slender thread fell broadcast, like a golden mantle over the whole scene below. And with it, all things at the instant seemed to come into joy and cheeriness. The men at the little drinking shop looked up, ceased from their quarrelling and entered into rapturous fraternity over new draughts. Out from the armorer's shop the workmen poured to gaze for a moment at the fresh sunlight; and then stood silent and reflective at the doorway; a group of meek and pleasant faced men, as it chanced, whose very peacefulness of aspect seemed to affect the warlike implements hanging on either side and charge them with merely innocent purpose. Away off

down the narrow street beyond the square, the old tumble down houses took on quaint and picturesque shades which brightened up the half effaced gloom of poverty and squalor ; and now the wretched population swarmed forth from their kennels to bask in the bright sunlight and enjoy a momentary forgetfulness of their rags. There was still the stone pillory in the middle of the square ; but now that no criminal stood there to face the howling of the mob, who could tell from anything it displayed, its real purpose ? And lo ! while Pere Rouflet and Manon gazed, a group of gypsy-jugglers clad in picturesque trappings of gold thread and crimson velvet, emerged from a side avenue, halted beneath the pillory and began their customary performance : around whom swarmed a motley crowd,—men and women a few, and children by the score, who with joyous animation gathered closely about and climbed to the very summit of the pillory, festooning it with merry faces.

" Nay," said Manon. " It may be that I am less devout in heart than I had thought, or with too little real knowledge of the world ; but be that as it may, I cannot see all things with your purer eyes. I see, rather, that the earth is very beautiful and fair ; and that if there be much poverty and disease, there is a brightness often showered down from Heaven to cheer the heart and make amends for all else. I see that the rough quarreling of men can lead to fraternal greeting,—that even the dread instruments of the law are not at all times used,

and may be turned sometimes to cheery purpose. Amid the whole scene, I can see nothing of gloom or sadness; unless it be those tree tops lifted above the convent wall like sentinels set over prisoners within, and speaking a tale of listless silence and captivity.—Oh, kind Pere Rouflet! good and faithful friend of mine! Must this, indeed, be my only fate?"

In that newly awakened anguish of her heart appealing for some different brighter lot than that now marked out for her, she forgot for the moment that it had been of her own choosing. She had imagined until that instant, that it could be in the power of no temptation longer to move her, so fully composed and peaceful did her heart seem to be at last. There might at times, indeed, have been much harsh schooling of her unquiet spirit, but she had believed she had at last allayed its truant longings. Some chance revolt at idle moments; but for the most part, rest. The convent doors seemed already opening wide to receive her, and in a few more hours she had deemed that perfect tranquility for her perturbed soul would come. But now, above and before her, was the bright sunlight, filling her as well as others with hopeful aspirations; and amid its brightness, the open convent door seemed very dark and cheerless.

"Is it yet too late, dear Pere Rouflet?" she cried, in a frenzy of impatient longing for a better fate. "See! I cast myself upon your kindness to tell me that there is something more suitable and needful for me to do. Oh

the sunlight and the soft cooling breezes of the far off mountains,—never have they appealed to me as now! Oh the rich radiance and beauty of the wide world,—never did I seem to love it as at this minute! Would that I were a man to take my own course and wander at will throughout it! What though it has its troubles and iniquities? Does it not have its joys and charities as well? You, Pere Rouflet, may choose to pass your days in gloomy cloister,—I, if a man, would take up other life than that. To be even a beggar at the roadside, so that I might still bask in the blessed sun;—to loiter at ease from one land to another, even as those gypsy jugglers;—better yet, to pass with trumpet-blast and with gay company of liege men, like yonder Knight, who now, —who coming hither now—"

She ceased, the words dying away between her palsied lips. Convulsively her hands grasped the window mullion to save herself from falling, as with whitened face she turned her agonized gaze from coming Knight to Priest now scarcely less pale than herself. For almost at the same moment, Pere Rouflet had seen Sir Loys,—riding slowly upon richly caparisoned steed across the square and toward the church.

"It is he,—Sir Loys!" exclaimed Manon, at last gaining words. "Do you not see him?"

For a moment longer Pere Rouflet faltered; then beneath the presence of that immediate necessity for action recovered himself with a strength of purpose that he could

not possibly have believed lay in him. And what now could he say longer to her about demon influences; when, at the instant, under the spur of need, he yielded himself in willing subjection to one fiendish prompting?

"Who, Manon?" he said, speaking with unusual calmness.

"Look! Loys himself! Riding on his steed as though to meet the King's Court! Plumes upon his bonnet and gold spurs upon his heels, as even in the fullest glory of his manhood and grace! And we had thought him slain! See; now he passes close beside the church! It is he,—it is himself at last!"

"What mean you, Manon? Are you indeed distraught? Is it this servitor you speak of, now riding across the square upon his ragged mule, with baskets at his side and oaken cudgel under his arm?"

"A servitor? I know not whom——Look! He stops and speaks for a moment to his esquire on foot,—then rides on, again!"

"I see, only, Manon, that the servitor draws the bridle upon his mule, chaffers an instant with a bystander,—then pursues his way as before."

Manon turned, and with affrighted pale face gazed upon Pere Rouflet. A moment more, and he would have quailed and broken down beneath her imploring yet searching gaze. But while the scrutiny lasted, he maintained his air of resolute innocent composure; and now with convulsive weeping, Manon sank upon her knees.

"I see it all!" she sobbed. 'I am indeed distraught or driven by the power of some foul fiend which would mislead me, in that I let my wandering senses imagine what does not exist. For I know, dear Pere Rouflet, that you of all others would not deceive me. Alas! why or how should I dare to talk about sunny fields and mountain slopes,—I who am only fit for seclusion from the world? Take me, and place me in that convent gloom, whence I can no more come forth. There, in that darkness and obscurity let me try to find present peace and await the more perfect quiet of the tomb."

CHAPTER XI.

PERE ROUFLET lifted her tenderly from the ground,—pitying her distress, yet not with sufficient power of pity to undo his work. At the moment, influenced only by the great dread of losing the benefit of what he had already accomplished, it seemed to him that he had done only what was necessary,—that it was a trial forced upon him by fate and not to be avoided, and that it must be persevered in to the very end. Why now hesitate or relent? Why weakly give the rein to a false compassion? In three days Manon would be within the convent walls; and her peace of mind, hitherto so grievously threatened, would be assured to the last and beyond recall. There remained now only Sir Loys to be directed and influenced towards the one wise purpose.

There was no time to lose. Sir Loys had already ridden past the cathedral, but at any moment he might return. Indeed, it was near the hour at which he was wont to enter and gaze upon the picture in that constant effort to strengthen his allegiance to his lawful love. Therefore Pere Rouflet now lifted Manon from the floor;

and seeing her restored, with a few hurried words of mingled consolation and advice bade her farewell. He would see her again,—he would then be prepared to counsel her more fully,—meanwhile let her pass her time at home in devout thought and not too needlessly wander into the open street. So, closing the door upon her, with careful scrutiny lest Loys de Martelle might once more be riding past, he entered the main body of the building and stood before the painting.

It was later than he had previously labored, and at any moment, though the cathedral at that moment happened to be empty, some worshipper might enter and surprise him at his task. That, indeed, would matter little ; since what he might be seen doing would carry little comprehension into the ordinary mind. What he now dreaded most was interruption from Sir Loys. And so it happened, that almost at the instant Pere Rouflet appeared with brush in hand before the picture of Sainte-Clotilde, he heard the sound of hoofs outside, then their sudden stoppage and then again the rattle of spurs and sword as the rider dismounted and strode into the church. There was little time left for thought ; and with a muttered prayer for guidance,—an invocation to the Saint herself, by some strange inconsistency, for aid in her own disfigurement,—he passed his brush almost recklessly across the picture,—a dot here and a shadow there, laid on in almost random desperation ;—then hastily stole away to the front.

From that little distance now gazing upon his work, Pere Rouflet stood fairly transfixed at the result. It seemed as though hours of study could not have perfected his designs as fully as in that one moment of careless unreflecting labor. There was still the whole likeness, as before,—still unimpaired, the stately attitude all aglow with gold and purple. But the few attributes of love and grace remaining up to that moment,—what had become of them? Where were now the sweet serenity, the calm benignity, the abounding spirit of forgiveness? Whence this new coldness and impassiveness of gaze,—this almost sneering turn of lip in seeming disparagement of faith,—repellant, even, of all earthly appeal? Pere Rouflet stood appalled. Had Heaven indeed aided him? Had the Saint willingly consented to this mockery of all her loving attributes? Or had he been purposely led into some dreadful excess of irreverence, until he had been incited to overdo his task and make himself not only an outcast from Heaven's love, but also a victim of insulted man's just hate?

Anxiously Pere Rouflet listened to Sir Loys' heavy tramp upon the pavement, ceasing only when he stood still at his accustomed place; tremulously he awaited a loud burst of anger, provoked by aroused realization of the long-studied deception. But the expected outbreak did not come. Only a fixed and troubled gaze, more disturbed now than ever before,—only new flickering waves of uneasy doubt, which however, as the Priest

watched him, seemed to resolve themselves at last into form of certainty. Then a heavy sigh; and catching sight of the other, Sir Loys beckoned his approach.

"I can no longer have a doubt, good Pere Rouflet," he said. "For many days past, I have looked into my own heart and studied all its depths, and now the truth is assured to me as well as though I read it upon emblazoned parchment. Hear me, therefore. I do not often go to the confessional,—it may be that being no better than what I am, it is most fitting that I should stay away. But there are moments when the heart is so charged with the weight of its own emotion, that one must tell his story to another, or else, perhaps, die from the unrelieved burden. To you, therefore, I now speak; —not as to Priest, but as I would confide myself to a friend, had I my nearest, dearest friend at hand."

"Speak on, then, Sir Knight, if so you insist."

"I do insist; and now listen. When a few days ago, I told you about my friend who had loved the original of yonder face, I basely uttered a deceit. It was about myself alone that I then spoke. It was I who had loved the girl,—had thought to have forgotten her—had all the while unwittingly kept a corner for her in my heart,—had felt my affection for her revive at the first glimpse of her gold and purple representation. I surprise you greatly in the avowal, do I not?"

"There are many things coming to us and bringing surprise," answered Pere Rouflet earnestly. "Go on,—

let me know more, if there be more which you wish me to hear."

Speaking thus, he gazed more intently than ever before at the young Knight, wondering what manner of person this might be who could think to have so easily deceived one whose business it was to watch the working of the human heart, and with keen analysis to separate falsehood from truth. And gazing, he realized for the first time the perfection of that manly beauty which could so readily and abundantly attract the love of high and low born, alike. Youthfulness and vitality,—grace of form and nobility of expression,—culture, intellect, and impress of lofty daring,—all were there exemplified ;—the very simplicty of heart which would credit others with too easy and undoubting faith now pictured upon Sir Loys' countenance in open, radiant ingenuousness. What wonder that the heart which once looked there for its resting place should pine for a return, and find that the outer world was all too narrow and cheerless !

"I will go on, Pere Rouflet, since so you ask. Though look you, it is only a poor tale of human love and may not interest you. I know well that I ought not to forget how little, either by profession or nature, you can care for such matters,—looking upon them rather as the foolish eccentricities of mere worldings."

"Fear not my lack of interest, Sir Knight. I would hear it all." And Pere Rouflet winced at the other's words ; even as once before he had suffered at the cold-

ness and innocence imparted to him, his heart all the while in raging tumult of passionate despair.

"And yet, Pere Rouflet, what after all is there for me to tell, other than what I have? It was myself and not a friend of mine who had loved the girl,—in that, the whole matter is contained. To speak further is to repeat myself,—to utter anew the same old story with needless expansion. Alas, alas! that true love should rage so wildly; and, in the end should die out, with knowledge that it has fed upon deceit alone! There are those," he continued, the torrent of his recollection of the past seeming to force him into that discussive flow which he had professed his purpose to avoid,—"there are those who believe that the love of one of noble birth for any one beneath him can be only a light and transitory matter, soon exhausting itself, and burning down to mere lifeless satiety. It may be that this is generally so,—and still not always. For if so, how is it that my passion for Manon proved so powerful and lasting? Yet not differently from the rest of the world did I myself, at the first, look upon such lowly love; for when in the beginning I saw Manon at her window, it was rather in spirit of transient admiration than of heartfelt love that I regarded her. The willing toy of the moment as others had their toys;—so, only, was my thought about her. Not to be wondered at, either; seeing that her beauty was not of open obtrusive nature, but of quiet power, stealing into the heart and influencing it with gentle tones and soft sympathetic

glance, rather than with correct chiselling of feature and harmonious and attractive tints. Little by little,—so did those more subtle charms of voice and glance and manner sink into and influence my whole nature. Step by step—so did I begin, in the absorption of that love, to forget myself and the world around me,—throwing duty aside, and letting the hope of fame grow dim, and all for Manon."

"That, indeed, was a cruel wrong to yourself," remarked Pere Rouflet, feeling that he should not listen altogether without comment.

"Not entirely to myself, Pere Rouflet. That might little matter, as the world goes; seeing that it would none the less go on as usual, without assistance of either my duty or my fame. But meanwhile, as you know, I had legally and in all propriety given my love to another,—the fair Cecile;—and now I found it basely turning back from her who rightfully owned it and clinging to her who should own it not at all. Do you think I did not struggle against such breach of faith? Do you think I did not strive with kindness and all semblance of devotion to train my heart aright? But it is an unruly heart, and would not therein guide itself at my command; and so my whole career in life and the happiness of another person who surely deserves everything from me seemed destined to be wrecked upon that shoal of passion. Until all at once—"

"Well, Sir Knight?"

"All at once there came a cruel ending of the matter,

for Manon left me. How and under what pretence I have before told you, speaking about her desertion as from a simulated friend. The blow,—it was a hard one for me, indeed; yet all the same, perhaps it was a needed one. It roused my pride, and thereby stirred my soul to action. Resolving to forget her, I sprung from idle dalliance, buckled on my armor and sought the field. You know the rest; how that I bore my part in siege and foray, and gained an honorable wound which was thought at first to have been my death, then lay for months in close captivity, and after that was ransomed and returned hither not many weeks ago. And yet, even during that long siege and captivity, I failed in my power to forget the past and my heart seemed broken with the memory of the love forever vanished. I would lie at night beneath the stars and think of Manon by the hour together; striving at times to invent good reason for her conduct, so that thereby I might justify to myself my lingering love, at other times endeavoring to move my heart to rage, through memory of my wrongs, so as to lead me to indifference and peace. And oh! how often would I dream the night long through about Manon's sweet face when it was only about Cecile far off in her convent retreat,—about Cecile alone, with her pure trusting, waiting love that I should have thought! But at last, indeed, I seemed to forget all such disloyal fancies, and to come once more into my right mind."

"With which, doubtless, as with every good action,

came the long desired peace of heart: is it not so?" Pere Rouflet inquired.

"Yes,—yet only for so long as those good promptings lasted. With my ransom paid, came return homeward, visitation of familiar scenes, and renewal of all past association. Even as I hurried to the castle where Cecile aware of my return awaited me with words of love and tenderness, I passed through the streets where I had walked at eventide with Manon, and I glanced up to the high turret window at which I had first seen her, leaning out to gaze upon the street below, and I thought no longer about her late perfidy and deceit but only about the sweetness of affection which once she had lavished upon me. Even as I greeted Cecile, and looked upon that abounding beauty grown still more gloriously attractive during my absence, with here and there an added trait of tenderness and soft repose from past solicitude about my uncertain fate, the gentle lovelit eyes of Manon seemed to come between us. It was as though some diabolic fate encompassed me, driving me onward to miserable falsehood; and with inward cursing of myself I seemed to wither beneath the blight of weakness, even as I wreathed my face with smiles in answer to Cecile's unsuspecting welcome."

"Alas! Even then had you no self-control?"

"None, Pere Rouflet; and still less, later. For not many days thereafter, it chanced as you may remember, that I saw for the first time yonder picture. Little then,

with my recollections of the past so tenderly encompassing me did I discern, as now I do, the real truth therein depicted. With my imagination all astray and worked up to frenzied heat, I saw only grace and beauty and abounding love, as in the olden days. I went from here with my heart again inflamed and my honored troth for Cecile trailing once more in the dust. And as indicative of how deeply and absorbedly I felt,—of how each thought of love and suggestion of the fancy spoke only of Manon,—I will tell one circumstance."

"Speak on, Sir Knight."

"That evening, I chanced to pass the convent wall just outside the church. There is a little iron gateway sunken at one point within the stone wall, as well you know; and at that gateway stood a small frail-figured religeuse, seemingly awaiting admission. At least, she was standing motionless, with one hand clasping the thick iron stauncheon in expectant attitude. What relation do you think that humble figure in gray could have had to my lost Manon? How could she ever have association in my mind with one who always delighted in bright apparel, attuning her presence with rare equity to the sunshine of her heart? And yet, so filled was my mind with one idea, so ready was it to associate that idea with every passing circumstance, that as I gazed through the gathering darkness at that frail humbly clad figure, it brought Manon to my mind as by a flash of inspiration. Something in the attitude impressed me,—something in its

very appearance of weariness. I remembered how Manon had once stood before me in just such posture; thoughtful for the moment and weary of sportiveness, replacing her gittern upon its accustomed shelf and so pausing with one hand extended above her, still clasping the instrument. I swear to you, Pere Rouflet, I was tempted for the instant to rush forward and accost the little religeuse, so thoroughly did the subtle influences of Manon seem to encompass her as with an atmosphere."

"But you did not?" somewhat rashly exclaimed the other, the perspiration starting to his forehead and his voice quavering with apprehension.

"Nay,—why should I do so? It was a momentary impulse, only; soon checked by my re-awakened judgment. Manon was dead,—that thing I too well knew; how could even the most accurate likeness of another to her have power to satisfy me? So I passed slowly onward, not even turning a glance behind to see whether the religeuse had gained admission. And then, warned more surely than I had ever been before, of the dangerous current of my thoughts and of the necessity of directing them into new channels, I gave up all my heart and soul to influence them aright. You may remember how often,—still speaking as in behalf of my simulated friend,—I tried to gain from you the truth about Manon's past life. I thought that if I learned that she had been faithful to me, I must perforce remain constant to her memory; but that if she had been unworthy, I could tear her from

my heart with scorn and so redeem myself. You would not betray the secret of the confessional, Pere Rouflet; and therefore I left you with anger in my soul. But as I turned away, you said that in some other manner, peace might come to the troubled heart."

"And it did, Sir Knight?"

"It did. Though at the time I scorned the word, yet it has so come to pass. Is it then true that you have some sacerdotal power to influence the mind for good? How it has come about, indeed, I know not. I have made neither prayer nor confession; nor have I done anything else to change my state of mind; and yet, little by little, the real truth has all the while been stealing over me. Do you know how? Only, indeed, by gazing constantly upon that picture, in which at first I saw nothing except unequalled loveliness and trust; but in which I now detect cold calculation, pretended and interested love, a nature vain and arrogant and cheerless. Noting this change and knowing that it must have been the real truth forcing itself upon my more reflective nature, now I realize how I have been deceived in the past,—how I have been held helpless by mere force of passion, unworthy and unreal."

"And yet, Sir Knight, she may not have been false to you," said Pere Rouflet. For even as he listened, there came a pang across him, that through his influences Manon was being thus maligned; and he felt that he should bring back some pity for her into the other's

heart, even at the risk of undoing all that he had so painfully accomplished.

"Let that be granted, Pere Rouflet, if so you will. What care I how it might have been? Two weeks ago, I would have been glad to learn her falsity as my only refuge for peace. Now I regard it not. It is on other grounds that I speak. My mind has come right again; and I see,—reading it from yonder picture,—that if she were ever faithful to me, it was not so much from depth of passion as from convenience,—that if she repented at the last, it was because the memory of myself was not powerful enough to draw her back to me,—that so easily abandoning me, it would not have greatly pained her if I had first abandoned her,—that I need not longer reproach myself with suggestions of any broken heart within her breast, seeing that she had not a heart that could be made to break for any one. And learning all this, now I know how little I have lost and I am again at peace.—But tell me; do you feel quiet in your mind with reference to your fame?"

"How mean you, Sir Knight?"

"Why look you! You rest your reputation most earnestly upon this picture,—the greatest of your works. All men approve of and applaud it, and even the great Leonardo da Vinci has added the seal and testimony of his approbation. And lo! no sooner does one critical beholder like myself make careful study of the painting, than he discovers in it errors and offences that have

escaped all other eyes, and thereby prove the work to be by no means faultless. Where now are the grace and soul-lit beauty and compassionate long suffering that the great crowd of critics following close upon each other's heels like silly sheep have recognized in the picture? How saddened,—how angry might be your patron Saint, who must be supposed to know all things, at finding herself portrayed so beautiful, indeed, yet withal so soulless, calculating and repellant!—Nay, Pere Rouflet, take not my poor criticism to heart. It was only made in jest. It would ill become me to wound your pure spirit, upon this our last meeting."

"Last meeting, Sir Knight?"

"Yes,—for now that I have effected my purpose of relieving my heart from sorrow, by studying out the vanity of all my former confidence and love, why should I return again? For now, indeed, the intent of my late lingering here has been accomplished and it needs no repetition. Rather let me devote my future to the love that so richly deserves my gratitude and care; and as I bask in that sweet presence, let me give every moment to making due atonement for past neglect. At once will I repair to Cecile and tender her my full unfettered troth of sweet undisguised affection."

"Do so, Sir Knight," was the other's quick response. "Let not the grass grow beneath your steed's hoofs before you have made yourself worthy of that perfect love so ready and earnest in its greeting of your own. I feel as-

sured that not many words or long labored acknowledgement of past fault will be needed to obtain her full forgiveness. And I know,—" the Priest continued, mindful of the little minature and yet not wishing to betray the secret, "I know full well that the lady Cecile holds even now at her heart that which will prove to you her long affection and enduring trust."

CHAPTER XII.

SO the Knight turning, passed down the long nave, his step quickening as he advanced, in his eagerness to begin the pleasant work of reconciliation and atonement. At his side and silently escorting him walked Pere Rouflet, in his bowed meagreness and coarse serge gown forming strange contrast with that stalwart laced and plumed companion, yet withal having some pleasing impress of quiet dignity, as doing the honors of his own especial place. Gaining the wide porch, Pere Rouflet held back the leather curtain that Loys de Martelle might pass forth,—then remained motionless upon the upper step while the Knight mounted his steed and rode away. A single gay parting salute from the belted plumed Knight,—a courteous answering nod that was half a benediction from the other at the open door; so the interview between the two ended, and Pere Rouflet turned again from the outer sunshine into the more familiar shade of the cathedral arches.

Now creeping slowly back along the nave, in his returning progress towards the choir, suddenly he felt his whole

frame sink into yet more contracted feebleness, his soul grow faint with oppressive perception of unworthiness and sin. What was this base thing that he had done,—acting thus a foul deceit, in order more surely to betray the heart that all the while had so fully trusted in him? How grossly had he not wronged and persecuted his better nature, to accomplish an end which after all might rather, perhaps, have been left to work out its own destined devices?

Up to that moment, Pere Rouflet had scarcely had time for settled thought. The necessary hurry of his action had driven away all power for reflection, while afterwards the company of the Knight had seemingly sustained him against self reproach. But now he was both alone and unemployed; and with that, the thoughts that he had thus far kept at bay pressed tumultuously upon him, overwhelming him with the undisguised perception of the true and culpable nature of his deed. Not, indeed, as regarded his long continued and skilful deception of the Knight. Either that the gradual and slow progress of that act had hardened him with use, or else that he looked upon Sir Loys as a strong man able to protect himself and thereby not entitled to too much tender consideration for possible weakness and credulity, Pere Rouflet gave little heed to the sin of the deceit and felt no especial remorse for what he had therein done. But how was it with that one concentrated act of base falsehood to Manon, striking down her shield of trust, and using her weakness for her sorrow and destruction?

"It was right that I did it, he muttered to himself. "Else might she have flown again to her lover; and where then her hopes of heaven?"

Yet though the plea for justification seemed good, in his heart it gave him no satisfaction. It quieted him not in his recollection of the despairing glance with which she had sunk upon the floor, her very unshaken confidence in his truthful friendship aiding and increasing her heartfelt misery. It drove not away the fiend which seemed to pour mocking taunts into his ear, as though welcoming him for fellow-laborer in the ways of unkind torturing deceit.

"I will give myself up to work," he said. "I have been idle of late; and thereby come these foolish fancies unsettling my mind and making me afraid about the good I have done, by reason of some chance irregularity in the method of its doing."

Then turning from the nave, he entered his little studio and prepared for labor. The Saint Jerome stood yet unfinished upon the easel; and upon this creation of his fancy, scarcely in some respects less glorious than his famous Sainte-Clotilde, he made ready to put the finish of his genius. But when he had mixed his colors afresh and stood brush in hand before the picture, he started back with affright. Why did the Saint thus harshly and reproachfully gaze upon him? Truly the face was nothing altered from what it had been a few hours before, when it had seemed to bend upon him a calm, benignant, ap-

proving smile. Now the smile was gone, and there was only expression of stern rebuke, as for some lately committed sin. What was that sin, Pere Rouflet's unquiet conscience too readily told him, and how that the realization of it had changed his own perception of the qualities of his Saint Jerome. For the moment came the thought to paint a beaming smile upon the repellant face of the Saint, and thereby strive in fancy to reconcile his own creation to himself, even as he had made the Sainte-Clotilde distasteful to another ; but the next moment he abandoned this idea as puerile. Rather let him postpone all further labor upon that picture until another day, when doubtless his quieted soul might find itself more consonant with its calmer and benignant attributes. In the meanwhile, there might be other labors less disturbing in their influence.

He turned the face of the Saint Jerome to the wall, and from his table drew forth a roll of vellum. Upon this, many months before, he had begun illumination of a saintly prayer for adornment of monastery wall. The work was already so far advanced that the text was well nigh all laid in, and its bordering of gold and purple in fanciful arabesque exaggerations was half completed. Surely Pere Rouflet could give himself up to such a task as this without perturbation of soul. Yet even here he found no peace ; for in each corner of the bordering and among the wild tangle of grotesque lines and curves lurked pictured cherub heads ; and these seemed now to cast

strange glances upon the artist, losing their celestial character and rather leering upon him with expression of malignant scoffing as though changing from angelic irritants into mocking fiends. So at last abandoning this labor, also, Pere Rouflet arose and disturbedly paced the studio.

"It was all for her good that I did it," he muttered, "and in the end, she will thank me for it. Even now, Sir Loys is forgetting her altogether, in the expressed affection of his betrothed; and as for Manon—"

He paused in his slow pacing to and fro, and looked out through the little window whence Manon and he had gazed a few hours before. Yes,—it might be a pleasant world to such as knew how to use it for its advantages,—so much should be admitted; and yet it was not altogether such an alluring place that disappointed love might not fly from it and call devotion's aid to assist in bringing forgetfulness of its vanished dreams. Already the sun was sinking, and the first gloom of evening hovering near, in readiness to fall. The labors of the day were nearly over, and peace and quiet were succeeding the late activity and excitement. There came no longer the loud clang of beaten metal from the armorer's shop; and now the workmen, their leathern aprons not yet thrown off, were resting in the open air outside. The gypsy conjurors had departed in search of other fields of profit, and the stone pillory stood divested of its living garlands; yet there were still

a few weary wretches sitting in repose upon the lower step, tranquil and at peace, and without thought of the unpleasing nature of the instrument overhead. In every direction, severe labor and violent indulgence seemed to have coalesced into the happy medium of calm content.

"Sir Loys forgetting Manon altogether at this very moment," said Pere Rouflet, continuing his former train of thought. "And Manon,—she soon to be at the convent,—no more to see Sir Loys for ever. She will even learn in time to remember him no more, it may well chance. Yet sometimes I—"

Yes,—sometimes he himself might chance to see her, for a moment. There were times when a priest might be called into the convent upon especial purpose. It might be to conduct a service, and then he would see Manon sitting in her place among the other inmates. It might be that he would be summoned to administer consolation to some dying nun,—to Manon herself, perchance; and then he could once more speak with her, and it might be that with her last words she would tell him that she remembered all his past kindness to her, and with some such parting, would make him happy for life. In any event, whether he were ever to speak with her or not again, never more could she look upon Sir Loys de Martelle.

His face flushed as he thus reflected, and his whole frame seemed to shrink with the overpowering sense of sin and meanness. For now he realized as never before,

how that his struggle to baffle Manon's yearning to see Sir Loys had not been altogether prompted by pure and praiseworthy motive. It was not merely the desire to save her from repetition of her sin; but rather the spirit of selfish jealousy, resolving that if it were not in the nature of things for her to love himself, she should never turn again to other love. Now at last finding his long hidden and distempered thoughts crystalizing into shape, he knew the whole measure of his fault, and cringed beneath it.

Alas! alas! And had it really come to this, that he had thus schemed and forsworn himself, merely to hinder her from one great parting joy? For what after all,—now more justly than ever before, he reasoned—what could be the harm that she should have seen her lover once again? Surely it would not have resulted in renewal of the olden ties; for if hitherto she had had the strength to break away from him, how much more now, when her soul had been so greatly purified with good works and abounding devotion? It would have been a kindly parting, with forgiveness freely given from either side, and she would have gone away into the convent gloom cheered with lasting happiness and content. Instead of which, he, Pere Rouflet, in whom, not only by virtue of his office, but also of his long professed friendship, she had confided, had striven to betray her trust, and to send her into lifelong seclusion with misery and uncertainty in her heart.

He looked again out into the gathering gloom, and let

his gaze rest upon the convent. A long high stone wall,—a tomb like façade at the further end,—within, tall trees standing motionless and in close array, like sentinels stationed there to guard the inmates,—this was all. Over this loneliness and seclusion, the brooding of a spirit of peace and protection ; the whole scene, like that of the world outside presenting good and evil mingled in equal degree ; its several features revealing themselves in greater or less prominence as the hearts of those within must naturally have attuned themselves to either. To some, the place a prison,—to others, a rest and refuge for the weary; and how now would it prove to Manon ?

"I thought,—it seemed to me that I was doing right," Pere Rouflet murmured again to himself. "Whether or not it were for myself, surely it were for her good as well. And yet—"

Torn with these disturbances and doubts, he now moved away from the window and passed from his studio into the body of the Cathedral. It has been said that at times he was wont to walk reflectingly up and down the sombre aisle ; his only pastime and rest from labor, —his only refuge from troublings of thought. Now with his hands clasped before him and his head bowed, he paced in its full length and with quick tread, the aisle fast darkening with the night ; while he strove, as often before, to calm his mind with this nearest approach he ever knew to energetic action. But all in vain. His troubles hitherto had been light and easily composed com-

pared with this; they had been anxieties felt for other's sins and not for any of his own. More and more inquiet grew his soul; and strangely enough, whatever before had been most familiar to him, seemed now to confront him in unfriendly spirit. The tablets along the walls to the memory of good men, and with whose goodness he had felt his soul akin,—what now were these but reproaches of himself? The recumbent warriors in stone, their mailed hands pointed upward in prayer,—how strangely they seemed to frown upon him through the darkness, even as Saint Jerome had turned a forbidding face upon him! There on the left was the familiar blank space in the wall where the erring Abbot had been immured,—his fault consisting in unholy love for the fair creatures of earth; was that a more guilty thing than to have crushed a fair young heart by trampling out its love?

Turning again, he passed from out the aisle and stood in the broad nave before the high altar. Within the past few minutes the darkness had gathered still more deeply about him. Transepts and arches were already shrouded in gloom,—carvings of corbel and finial were lost in indistinctness,—even the great nave was now only dimly lighted by a dull gleam from the end-window; and as he gazed, this remaining vestige or the day, glimmering for an instant along the white marble pavement, fled from before him as though magically swept away. The stained glass windows grew opaque and undefined, the great rear window sharing in the gloom: and of the full-length

figure portrayed upon it, neither form nor feature could longer be traced out,—nothing remaining but irregular lines where the edges of the panes of glass cut their several ways across the broad surface of the whole.

And now as Pere Rouflet there stood alone and unabstracted, with only his own thoughts to keep him company, the excitation of the last few days still further passed away and a reaction came in new direction. Hitherto he had regretted his deceit only as it regarded Manon, but now it shaped itself into repentance in that it also concerned Sir Loys. Spite of all his former convincing self-argument and of his readiness to find approval of his stealthy labor, now that the work of disguise upon the painting had been so successfully accomplished, he began to doubt the propriety of it. What was he, that he should have interfered with cunning wiles and inventions, to bring reconciliation to those who were of so little account with him? What was he that he should have impaired the glorious representation of departed Saint for the comfort of any living present? Had it been anything less than act of sacrilege to place his destroying hand upon that once glorious figure of his artistic creation,—bringing it thereby into contempt? What punishment, indeed, could be too great for that? What pardon could he ever hope to find? Darker and darker grew the hour,—more deeply shadowed the great window, the witness of his offence,—more hopelessly shrouded in dense gloom his repentant spirit.

It was not strange, then, that in his despair he should have become nerved to do at once what he had resolved upon, for the coming dawn. The Knight had said that he would not return again: why therefore leave the painting a moment longer to its enforced distortions, rather than now restore it to its pristine beauty? The alterations upon it having been made in simple water-color, could easily be removed. Prudence whispered to Pere Rouflet even now, that to accomplish this with safety to the rest, he should wait until daylight, lest in the attempt some damage might ensue; but the condition of unhealthy desperation into which his mind had fallen counselled instant action. Anything rather than thus remain supinely mourning for his fault and not striving to undo it. All risks, indeed, rather than that for even a single night longer the great painting should be suffered to remain in its disguise of coldness and uncomeliness. Might not the grace which had aided his brush to impair its beauty, now assist him to re-illume it? Transported with a frenzy which would admit of no control, he groped his way behind the altar, raised himself upon the carved mouldings until he stood on a level with the picture,—then hurriedly passed a dampened cloth blindly hither and thither across where he judged the face should be.

And as he did so, the outer silence was broken by the clash of steel, mingled with loud oaths, alternate shouts for assistance and revenge, the sudden sharp cry of wounded men, and indeed, all such sounds of affray as

betokened combatants fighting their way along the street; until at last the din growing nearer and louder, resounded from the very entrance of the cathedral porch.

CHAPTER XIII.

SO for a time the clash of weapons continued, and was broken only by the loud breathing of contending parties as each instant they fought their way still further into the body of the cathedral; and, in another moment, a single combatant holding steadfast in his hand a broken rapier was forced through the inner door into the nave. For a second he yet stood at bay; and then as three or four of his enemies pressed hard upon him, he turned and fled towards the altar. The others made a step or two forward as though to pursue,—then stopped irresolute, impressed with the irreverence of their purpose,—then slowly sheathed their swords and scowling fearfully fell back and stood in a close cluster at the entrance. One among them remained for a moment longer with his weapon unsheathed, while he watched the receding figure of the fugitive. He too, at length thrust his sword into its scabbard, with an energy that made the arches of the building echo with the harsh rattle; then with an oath of baffled rage, fell slowly back among the others.

At first quickly, and then with a slower pace as he saw that he was no longer pursued, the retreating man ad-

vanced towards the choir, flinging himself down upon the steps by which that portion of the floor was raised above the rest. Here he sat for a moment, panting from the exertion he had undergone. Then he was aroused into new action by the voice of Pere Rouflet. It needed not the pale moonlight stealing in at the great south window and falling in silvery sheen upon the cathedral pavement to tell the Priest who was this fugitive. It seemed as though his instincts had told him this, while yet the combat was raging outside,—as though his assurances of quiet and success during the day had all the while been realized by him to be deceptive, even when most readily he had seemed to be putting his fullest confidence in them. Now the sudden emergency of the moment swept away as a cloud his late unruly access of distempered doubt and ungovernable transport; and he stood looking down upon Loys de Martelle with as stern composure as though his soul were sea of ice never to be ruffled.

"What disturbance is this?" he asked. "What brawl have you been engaged in, Sir Knight? Why enter this place with your naked sword?"

"I have slain a man; is there anything singular in that?" responded the other. And as he spoke, Pere Rouflet could not fail to note the careless reckless tone, as of one so environed by circumstances of ill that life had become a mere plaything and reputation only a breath. "I have been driven to this place by his adherents; I now claim shelter and sanctuary."

"Sanctuary you can have," Pere Rouflet replied, and with full assurance that his promise could be carried out. For the protection of the altar was too powerful to be transgressed; and though an army might peer in through every window, the criminal who had once gained that refuge for the time was safe. Then, seeing that a shade of trouble and doubt passed across the fugitive's face at noting the figures of the pursuers still clustered threateningly at the distant porch, Pere Rouflet took his single unsupported way down the nave and approached them. Upon his own ground and in authority there, there was a certain air of dignity and power even in that poor stunted figure as it slowly paced onward. At sight of it making its quiet and resolute progress towards them, the right hand uplifted in stern warning, the little group huddled yet closer together, then gazed irresolutely at each other, then one by one stole softly away. A moment more, and they had all departed. Then Pere Rouflet returned to the raised choir and stood looking down upon the fugitive still resting upon the lower step.

"You will tell me the meaning of all this, Sir Knight," he said. "I can judge even now that the hope I had formed for you has failed me,—that fate or your own evil passion has proved too powerful for you,—that there has been foul wrong done somewhere. Was it by yourself or merely against you? Is your soul guilty with bloodthirsty intent, or has your act been one of self-defence? All this I must hear from your own lips."

"It is as well that you should do so, Pere Rouflet," was the rejoinder; and again with that mocking reckless tone that spoke of a brave spirit forced into desperation of thought and purpose. "You can not ask it as of right; but now you are host and I am guest, and it is fitting perhaps that I should tell you the story. It is a relief to have some one in whom I may confide, easing thereby my mind; and moreover, it were better that you should hear from me the true narration of it all, rather than a false account from others. Was it my own wrong act, did you ask? By my faith! scarcely can I tell; so woefully has the whole day been confused with shifting of events, so hurriedly has fate driven me from one extremity to another."

"It is but a little while since last you were here," said Pere Rouflet. "It does not seem that many things could have meanwhile happened."

"Enough, however, to have changed the fortunes of many lives, good Pere. But I will tell it all: and as it may prove long in the narrating, sit you down so as to listen with greater ease and comfort. It suits me not that you should stand thus over me, looking down at me as though you were about to smite me with the thunders of the Church instead of listening as a friend who might advise and give needed sympathy. Sit you down, therefore; inasmuch, moreover, as it is no light or trivial story, and may yet weary out not only your endurance of body but your patience of soul, as well."

Obedient to the request, Pere Rouflet sat down beside the other; upon a higher step of the raised choir floor, yet not so high but what being of smaller stature than the Knight, he could listen with ease and comfort. Then Sir Loys, waiting yet a moment in silence, perhaps considering whether after all he had not better withhold narration, perhaps merely collecting the threads of his story into more manageable shape, began.

"It seems to me singular, Pere Rouflet, that I, who have ever been so reticent of all my thoughts, should now prepare to lay bare my whole heart to one whom I have known for so few days. This, too, not in confession which would bring its own seal of secrecy with it, but in that open conversation which prevents you not from proclaiming to all the world whatever of it you seem fit. But yet, as I have already said, there is now gathered about me so much misfortune which you will surely hear before many hours, should you chance to mingle with the world, that I have desire for you to know the real truth, and thereby, perchance learn that I am not stained with all that blackness of foul crime which others would impute unto me. Moreover,—and this may be the real secret of my confidence,—there is much need for my soul's comfort, that I should have converse with some one.

"You know with what elastic spirit of elation I parted from you, not many hours ago. It seemed to me, then, as though I were forever and altogether cured of a base

infatuation that for months had weighed down my heart and crushed out all its purer aspirations. Now at last,—I thought,—I could go my way untrammelled with any doubt, and freely yield up all the best affections of my nature to that one who most richly deserved them. Even as I left the church porch, it seemed as though the loving words with which I should greet Cecile sprang impulsively and unresisted to my lips, and the very pacing of my steed along the stony pavement rang in unison with the metrical outpouring of my soul's affection.

"So for a few moments. Then came reaction, slowly and surely driving away my confident serenity and again clouding my mind with doubt. Not that the olden love for Manon began as yet to come back; that frenzy I still believed to have been silenced forever. But for all that, there came doubts and uncertainty, regrets and miserable bewilderment. There is a legend, Pere Rouflet, in our up country annals, of one who sold his soul to the Arch-fiend, for store of gold. Such things may often have been done, of course; and it is in tradition that in a little town of Brittany the foul bargain was again repeated. And when the erring mortal went the next morning to feast his hungry eyes upon the golden ducats, lo! they were changed to lumps of stone. It seems to me, indeed, that for this deceit upon the great enemy's part, the bargain should be held of none effect, and the soul have been restored to him who had owned it,—tarnished, perchance, from its late impure association, but

for all that not incapable of renovation; but about that matter, the legend does not speak. But it does tell that the wronged and cheated man, upon seeing the valueless stones where had been the gold, burst into loud and passionate acclaim of grief and would not be comforted. It was not for the stones that he wept, but for the lost gold which they had once represented. Do you see the parallel of the matter in my own life, Pere Rouflet? Lo! as I passed along upon my charger, I began at heart to mourn for Manon. Not, indeed, for her as I had at last discovered her to be,—not for her who was cruel and base and crafty with all guile and selfishness, but for the pure loving being whom, in my imagination, she had once represented. Would that that person, so fondly loved might return; and since she had never existed, except in my own fancy, would that some of those qualities which I had imputed to her and which might well exist in others had remained. And then, thinking about Cecile, her beauty, grace and loving spirit, I began to weigh her in the balance, as it were,—contrasting her with the older imagery of Manon,—wishing that to such grace and beauty of the one might be added the tender fascination of the other,—wondering why that superior personal loveliness of form and feature, while it drew forth my admiration and approval could not compete with those more subtle charms of my lost love in kindling my utter self negation, devotion and enrapturement, —basely, all the while, indeed, poising the merits of

Cecile against those of the imagined Manon, and feeling more and more conscious, alas! that in many qualities I found her wanting.

"All this inner debate soon led of course to perplexity of spirit: can you wonder at it, Pere Rouflet? And naturally, I found that my mind was no longer calm and serene with the comfort and assurance I had carried away from here. Rather was it becoming a tempest-tossed sea, and ready to surge into mischief upon slight provocation. And as in such cases usually happens, the provocation was at hand. For as I drew near the castle of my betrothed, I saw clustered at the outside gate a group of retainers in livery of the Grand Duke of Mantua. And then, of course, I understood at once the situation. The Duke had been at Paris, had there discharged his duty at the Court, and being now upon return to his own country, had tarried on the way to see Cecile again, and doubtless attempt once more to move her heart in his favor. This at once angered me and made me ready for any inconsiderate and hasty action. Why should he, knowing full well that Cecile had been betrothed to me, dare now to come between us? Why should his higher rank give him that privilege which my mere equal could never maintain, to disregard my claims? And how in any event would he dare to do so, unless assured—which, alas! I myself already so well knew—that all her family and kin, dazzled with the glitter of his state, full openly encouraged his pretensions and were not lightly intent that

she should relinquish me in his favor? Transported with such bitter thoughts, I spurred on towards the postern, perhaps too heedlessly, and not drawing in my rein as carefully as I might have done if in better humor; whereby I rode too roughly among the retainers, and almost trampled beneath my steed's hoofs the Grand Duke's jester who, in fool's cap and with wooden sceptre, sat upon the ground dispersing merry conceits about him. With no slight damage to his bones, he crawled from beneath my charger, his bells ringing a discordant tocsin of danger; and scarcely tarrying to note whether I had not slain him outright, I rode through the postern-gate into the main court. And here, perhaps was error, Pere Rouflet, in that I had not taken care to see what might have befallen the jester. It is an ill thing to anger even the most humble; more especially a court-fool, who is privileged to say whatever he pleases, and need fear no violence in return. As now I rode onward to the court, I heard a peal of rude laughter behind me, doubtless from rough witticism of the Fool at my expense; and this little matter, which in calmer mood I might disregard as beneath me, now had the effect to increase my heat of temper and my disposition towards ill-advised action.

"Foremost of all other persons whom I saw in the main court was the Grand Duke, upon his horse, and with a group of armed retainers riding behind him. They were passing around to the outer postern, and doubtless he had just come from having audience with Cecile. What

might be the result of that—whether for good or ill to him, I could not by looking at him, ascertain. Whether elation or disappointment filled his heart,—all that matter he kept within himself; nor upon his impassive face did he betray any sign of feeling. Glancing at him with purport of stealthy inquiry, to mark in what spirit he bore himself, I could not but note more understandingly than ever before, how noble and full of manly nature was that unrevealing face, and with what spirit of royal and courtly grace he bore himself. This I admit: being not one of those who would gain credit or advantage for himself by low depreciation of a rival. And it was this very consciousness of worthy rivalry that now added to my bitterness of thought; making me, for that moment, uncertain how far the high rank of my noble rival might have gained influence through his courtly presence, to undermine my better claim.

"With polished grace the Duke lifted his plumed bonnet in greeting of me; and I saluted him in return, maintaining, not unsuccessfully I hope, something of his own quiet and reserved deportment. Then as the cavalcade rode slowly out through the postern, I dismounted from my steed and sought Cecile's apartment.

"There was not far to go,—a single flight of steps; and so, with one turn to the right, into the room where most ordinarily she received me. A long though somewhat narrow hall, with fretted ceiling, and lighted at the back and along one side by deep-set narrow windows with

glass richly stained. Here now sat Cecile at the further end, awaiting my coming, seeing that this was the hour of the day in which most usually I was accustomed to appear. Before her and at a little distance on either side, stood a frame work for tapestry, which here and there was already aglow with bright colors of the interwoven silk. Beside her chair were other seats for her maids-in-waiting, who were wont to assist her in the progress of her embroidery. These seats were now vacant, the maids having doubtless left the hall in order that she might hold her late converse with the Duke of Mantua undisturbed ; and as yet they had not returned. Cecile sat alone awaiting me ; and as she arose to return my greeting it seemed as though I had never seen her look so beautiful. The sweet ennobling expression,—the beaming of a new happiness that upon my entrance overspread her face,—for now at least I can remember its presence though so foolishly at the time I chose to disregard its loving indications,—the beauteous hair falling in thick wavy billows over her shoulders, in pleasant contrast with the darker color of her soul-lit eyes,—the bright sunlight with its varied tints filling the hall with a rich gleam of radiance that softened into gentleness every attribute of the scene which might otherwise have seemed rude and that gave new aspect of beauty to whatever was most lovely in itself ; —all this I could not fail at the time to notice. And yet with strange perversity I found myself turning away from that train of thought which should most readily have led

me onward to my better self, and indulging instead in wild errant fancies that could not fail to imperil the happiness that I had only to grasp and hold in sweet content. I see it now,—alas! why could I not see it then? But all the time, the demon that tempted me to my destruction would not be appeased; and even while I gazed enraptured and entranced at Cecile, there stole upon me the wonderment of how much of all that loveliness might be due to mere accessories of scene and dress; and of how beautiful, more beautiful, indeed, Manon might have seemed in that robe of purple velvet with those rich festoonings of lace, and the bright lustrous pearls fastened in her locks and the soft light pouring down upon her through the stained glass! Striving, though, to repress such thoughts, I advanced and lifted Cecile's hand to my lips. With that action came new thoughts equally needing repression. This hand, thus held out towards me, in loving greeting,—was it not the same hand which the Grand Duke of Mantua must have saluted a moment before when he made farewell of her?"

"All that was a base and ungenerous thought," exclaimed Pere Rouflet. "For what is there amiss in a courtly greeting? Or, if there were slightest taint of wrong, who are you that you should reflect upon it,—you with your heart filled at that very moment with loving longing for another?"

"A base and ungenerous thought, indeed," responded the Knight, not at all angered by the outspoken freedom

of the other; possible because Pere Rouflet had by his office the right to chide, and therefore might well be indulged in such vocation. "And am I not confessing all my baseness throughout, good Pere? Am I striving to extenuate anything that I have done amiss? Grant me at least the charity of believing that I know myself partially as I must seem to my most bitter enemy."

"Proceed, Sir Knight."

"Well, Pere Rouflet, that was my jealous reflection of the moment, and under the influence of it I said:

"'The Duke of Mantua,—I met him just below. It is an ill thing that he should thus continue to pay his court unto you; knowing, as well he must, that you are already pledged.'

"'An ill thing, indeed,' she answered, not taking my words in offence. For perchance it is not always displeasing to a maiden to listen to petulous reprovings, if they betray indication of a disturbed and jealous spirit. 'And yet, Loys, it may be that Dukes and Princes are inclined to hold themselves above the rules that restrain men of less rank in their dealings with each other. But it matters little. For the last appeal of the Duke was a farewell. To-morrow he will return to his own possessions, and thenceforth we will be freed from his further presence. He has relinquished his suit forever,—so he now says, seeing how hopeless it must be; and on his departure he has asked only one thing,—a favor which I could not grant, indeed, though I was sorely inclined to;

were it not that he might have taken the meaning of it amiss in spite of promise to the contrary, and have considered as done in love that which was only meant in friendship.'

"'And that favor, Cecile?' I asked.

"'This,' she said; and she lifted from the table at her side, where it had lain so buried in silken threads that I had not observed it, a little miniature of herself, in a fretted silver case. A beautiful and lifelike likeness of herself; the work, doubtless, of some famous artist of the Court. How, not having been at Paris for the last year, she could have had that perfect work accomplished, I know not. It is sufficient for the purpose that it has been done and with all secresy, the better to surprise me with the gift; and that the likeness is as replete and glowing with every grace of feature and impress of loveliness belonging to her, as though she had herself sat before the artist and let the fair image flow in some mystic harmony of color upon the vellum.

"'This, Loys,' she said, 'this was the favor. The Duke beheld this, which—which I had prepared for another; and taking it into his own hand, he besought me that I would allow him to retain it. I had rejected his suit—of that there could be no misunderstanding; therefore, since he might never in this world see me again, would I not let him have the portrait as a mere keepsake from a distant friend? Long, thus, he besought me; and with such earnestness that for a moment I was almost

inclined to yield. But the next, I constrained myself and said—'

"'Said what, Cecile?'

"'Said, indeed, that however I might express myself in grateful recognition of the honor and compliment he had done me, and however I might be disposed to offer much for him in the way of friendship, in this matter I must hold myself excused. For that the miniature had not been prepared with any ordinary intent, but with reference to a special purpose. That I had obtained it as gage and proof of affection for the only one I could ever love. That to this person alone, the possession of the picture—'

"Saying this, Pere Rouflet, she paused. What need, indeed, was there for her to speak further, so long as she knew that I ought to be able to read her heart aright,—so long as all her action so plainly was in correspondence with her words? For ceasing in speech, she gazed lovingly upon me and held the miniature lightly and loosely poised in her hand, within a few inches of my own, suggesting freely its true purposed destination,—almost as it were, thrusting it between my fingers which should have leaped impetuously towards the prize, but which, instead, remained motionless and unclosed."

"And why so, Sir Knight?"

"Why? In truth I can scarcely tell; unless it were that the attendant fiend which so long and diligently had constrained my mind to its assured disadvantage, still possessed me. But when I should have stretched forth

my hand to receive the picture, there came into my heart new whisperings of doubt, and again unjust comparisons of the present true love with the vanished false one. What though Manon had been false? All the same she had been loving, winning and impulsive in all her ways. She would not have stood thus motionless waiting for me to request the gift which I knew was already mine; for so at the time, in the blind infatuation of my doubting, I chose to interpret the playful reticence of Cecile, who really wished not to hold back from me anything that was my due, but merely desired in girlish sportiveness, that I should betray some loverlike interest in its bestowal. Manon,—I said to myself—would have thrust the little picture almost by force into my hands and would have stopped my thanks with plenteous outbreak of passionate embrace. Thus pondering and making unjust comparison, I let the propitious moment go by unseized, and stood with hands still morosely clasped; until at last Cecile's patience and forbearance both gave way. I saw the flush of disappointment—not even then, of anger—steal cloudily across her face, while her eyes lowered before mine with saddened expression; and so her hand slowly dropped and she placed the picture once more upon the table. Then, Pere Rouflet, I felt how deep had been my fault,—so bitter to her the slight."

"And with that knowledge, late as it came to you, you must then have striven, Sir Knight, to make amends? Tell me that you made swift amends."

"Indeed, I really strove to do so. Not with excuses for what I had already done; for it is ill attempting by such means, to cure a wound. But rather did I seek by other and different efforts, to cause forgetfulness of my heart's hardness. Standing beside her, my eyes fell upon the unfinished tapestry stretched upon the frame before us. What better means to soothe the female mind than to show interest in woman's arts or exploits? Therefore I stooped before the work, and told my admiration of it and of the taste that led her to assume it, and asked the subject of it, and in all proper manner strove to exhibit pleasure in it.

"'The subject of it, do you ask?' she said. And from one side she brought the vellum sheet; upon which, in outline for her to copy, and in coloring from which, if she pleased, she might vary at her taste, was depicted the whole suggestion of the tapestry. The design of one of the most famous painters at the Royal Court,—she said,—and the subject, *Achilles at the Distaff*.

"'I have heard of him,' I said. For you must know, Pere Rouflet, that all the learning of the day does not filter into churchly channels, but that even rough knights may have their chance opportunity for instruction. 'I have heard of him, Cecile, and of this portion of his life wherein he wielded the distaff instead of the sword and buckler. But methinks that in the story it was only when the trumpet sounded that he realized he was a man. How then does it happen that here, with no brazen

throated trumpet to recall him to himself, the distaff has fallen at his feet and he seems offering earnest love to one of his fair companions?'

"'So I enquired of the artist,' answered Cecile; 'but he replied, that though to the outer world Achilles had not stood revealed as a brave warrior before being incited by the clang of arms, yet often ere that, his heart must have betrayed its longings and affinities by gentle word or loving gesture.'

"'Loving gesture, indeed, Cecile,' I said; 'for behold him now, with arm thrown about the neck of the fairest of his companions and lips approaching hers with different intent than that of mere converse. And, he has thereby shown taste and inclination like unto my own, seeing that he has left alone the darker maidens and sought her who is light and blooming. Look! how in tint of cheek and hair,—in shape of face and feature,—in sparkle of the eye and smile upon the lip,—altogether in almost every trait and description, she whom he has been attracted towards is the picture of yourself! A very excellent Achilles, and altogether worthy of my commendation, Cecile.'

"At this her eye brightened up with pleasure, and her dawning smile grew yet more cheery, and I saw that this one kind speech of mine had done much to brush away past clouds and bring sunshine again into her heart. But with the license of maidenhood not letting herself be all at once conquered or turned from her vantage-ground

of past offence, she still affected resentment; coyly seeking to let it openly be seen, now that it had passed away, rather than to hide it as she had tried to do while yet she had it with her. And shaking her head with much assumption of doubt and incredulity, she said:

"'Alas! is Achilles any less manlike than are all men around us? For though he has chosen for his love she whom you so much commend, she seems not of herself alone sufficient to fill his heart. Look now where all the while his hand clasps the robe of one dark-haired maiden close behind him, as though even in the delirium of his present passion he cannot consent to release the object of his past affection.'

"Was it by some singular chance, Pere Rouflet, that Cecile thus spoke? Was she giving out merely some light suggestions of her fancy about man's fickleness in love? Or did her words have deeper meaning, being actuated by some knowledge of my own past career of passion, leading so often to indifference towards herself? Was her speech in fact a simple random jest, or rather a studied reproach? I could not tell. All her manner may have indicated the first, but there was that feature in the artist's picture which gave cogent suspicion of the latter. For it chanced that even as she whom Achilles clasped had some resemblance in feature and expression to Cecile, so she whom he forbore releasing from the grasp of his other hand was not unlike Manon. The same dark complexion and sorrowful pensive eyes, the same

thick braids of hair falling over the temples and concealing half the cheek with luxurious folds,—if this were mere chance, it had in it some strangely devilish stroke of fate for my overthrow. No matter, though. Even were it all purposed by Cecile, here was my opportunity by soft words and gentle looks to make amends for all past slights, and set myself again high up in in her loving favor. And with that intent I spake.

"'Rather let us say, Cecile,' I answered, 'that in the great absorption of his present passion, his faith in what has gone before is all but dissipated; and that, if by power of habit or association he clings at all to anything belonging to the past, it has no real endearment to his heart. It may well be that Achilles has felt his mind at some former time distracted by unruly temptation; but gazing closely at the picture, you can see that it is so no longer. Look! his fingers do not cling lovingly or regretfully to the robe of the dark haired damsel, however beautiful she may be; but in the position of them there seems rather that which betokens desire for speedy release from even the slightest entanglement. And see how he casts no glance behind, but lets his whole gaze fasten with almost delirious absorption upon one whom he now knows to be the true and only object of his affection.'

"'Say you so, Loys?' exclaimed Cecile. And I saw that she understood the hidden meaning of my words, and drew from them a bright augury of her future happiness,—so cheerily did the light of a new and perfect assur-

ance of my love kindle in her face, so radiantly did her joy in our perfect reconciliation gleam in response to my utterance. 'Say you so, Loys? Then take, now, the little picture and hold it ever as your own. A moment ago, I had selfish desire that you should ask for it at my hands: now I would rather force it upon you, in sign that there is nothing that my heart could ever deny you.'

"'Yes; give me the miniature,' I said.

"Again she lifted it from the table and held it a moment in her hand before releasing to me its possession; giving transported utterances of her new found joy, even as a bird will warble pleasant carols to her mate.

"'And to think, Loys, that there was really a time and not so long ago, in which I imagined that I could not trust in your affection. So dark the days seemed when at times you appeared unresponsive to me;—so long the periods wherein I awaited those loving words which I thought ought always to flow out towards me. And can you reprove me or wonder that at times I felt so hopeless;—distrusting you only because I distrusted my own power to please? For she is so beautiful,—in many things so much more beautiful than I.'

"'Who, Cecile?' I said.

"'Who, Loys, but the dark beauty of the picture,—of the great painting in the church? Could I help feeling some jealousy of her in my heart? Small and humble in manner as she seems,—ill and poorly clad,—could I look into her eyes as so lately I did and not there

mark that great absorbing loveliness of expression, that sympathetic enticement which—'

"'What mean you, Cecile?' I cried all aghast, and carried away with an impulse not to be resisted. 'Whom have you seen, and where? Can Manon still be living and I—I of all men not know it?'

"By the Gods! Pere Rouflet, I must have been for that moment frantic to speak as I did. I knew of course that Manon was not alive,—that Cecile was self-deceived,—that in some jealous mood she had been dwelling upon her contemplation of yonder picture, and having seen some girl of the people remotely resembling it, had too easily connected the two together in her thoughts. And yet it seemed for the instant as though she held such assurance of perfect knowledge, that I felt carried away with an absurd belief that she spoke in certainty, and that Manon was really yet living. And upon that impression, with such a great leap did the happy past come forward and encompass me, and so brightly did the fiction of Manon's continuing existence gild my thoughts with only the most pleasant reminiscences of other days, I felt overwhelmed as though the Heavens had opened to let down unexpected floods of happiness upon me. Manon alive? Manon seen of late by Cecile? I thought no longer of shame, disgrace, hard calculating action, ungenerous and deceitful motive, selfish desertion of myself,—of none of those bitter truths that of late I have schooled myself to realize. I thought

now only of that living trustfulness which I had once carried believingly in my inmost heart,—of that peace of soul which I had enjoyed during my self deception, and the awakening from which should never have come to me at all.

"'Manon alive;—and no kind spirit has ever let me know of it?' I cried; and then I looked once more at Cecile. She was standing motionless, spell-bound before me. Again her face was pale, her eyes startled and steadfastly fixed upon me, as with pain. It was not now mere sorrow that I read in her expression, but the just anger of an insulted outraged woman. I had gone at last one step too far,—had opened out my weak and faithless heart to her full contemplation; and in those few utterances of mine had disclosed my perfidy as thoroughly as though I had taken days to explain it. And as she now slowly recovered her power of speech, I saw written in her face the cold movement of a new and stern resolution, never to be turned aside again.

"'To the one whom best I should love,—that was the purpose of the picture, was it not?' she softly, almost whisperingly muttered, as communing inwardly with herself rather than speaking to me. 'Whom best I ought to love! To no one here, indeed, can it be given.'

"Slowly—very slowly, she let her hand fall upon the table; and there releasing the picture, let it lie where it had been at first. I would fain have seized it myself and covered it with kisses, so great now was my desire to show

repentance; but I dared not. I would have taken her hand in mine and on my knees have uttered wild protestations of affection and remorse; this also, it was beyond me now to do. For her eyes were resting upon me with cold, implacable, forbidding stare; and beneath their repelling power, somehow I could not find a single word to utter in my exculpation. And silently and with my heart cast down, I stole out from her presence, scarcely knowing what I did, until I found myself once more in the castle court yard."

CHAPTER XIV.

"THE courtyard was now almost deserted, for the Grand Duke with most of his retainers had ridden away to his new quarters. A few of his men-at-arms, however, lingered about the postern in idle conversation with the servitors of the castle. Among these still sat the Duke's Fool, swinging his bells with measured nodding of the head, and keeping his auditors in a roar with his professional jests and jibes. As I mounted my steed and rode by them, there came momentary hush,—followed when I had passed, by renewed laughter. Was this in continuation of some interrupted witticism having no reference to myself? Or, on the other hand, had my defeat shown itself so plainly in my face as to arouse their ready spirit of mockery? I could not tell, indeed. I knew that I had endeavored to assume and maintain a properly impassive demeanor and expression; and yet, when there is rage, turmoil and bitter self-reproach in the heart, there needs be, perhaps, that some evidence of it will show itself upon the face of any one not trained to conceal his emotions. I know, too, that when I heard that

laugh, which might or might not have had myself for its object, I felt in such a transport of rage that I would have liked to turn and trample all that group beneath my horse's hoofs ; and with difficulty I restrained myself so as to proceed upon my way with affectation of indifference.

"What now to do ? It seemed, at one moment, that I had so outraged Cecile's trusting nature, that there could never be forgiveness ; and this, indeed, should be the truth, inasmuch as my few words to her were not such mere matter of hasty speech as could be swept aside by tender action, but were in themselves a revelation of long perfidy and indifference, an explanation of everything that for weeks had seemed amiss in me. At other moments, I dreamed that I could yet be pardoned if I made loving overture ; and now so deeply did I regret what I had done, that I felt as if no self-abasement could be too low to gain that pardon, and that I could have bartered all my hopes of Heaven for the joy of once more listening to those loving words which had always been so ready to flow forth for me, and which I had so wilfully slighted. Yes, —for that I would demean myself in all lowly penitence. But yet, not now. An hour or two to let Cecile's resentment cool,—a little tarrying to allow some kindly recollections of the happy past to arise and urge her to tender forgetfulness of her wrong ; then I would reappear and throw myself at her feet and all should again be well.

"So, remorseful and uneasy, I lingered here and there

away from the neighborhood of Cecile until the evening came. Then, by the softened moonlight attuning my mind to more tranquil thought, and, as it would seem, to more collected power of urging my penitent appeal, I stole forth on foot and betook myself towards the castle. And when half way there, it chanced that face to face I met young Arnulf, Cecile's brother.

"You may remember him, Pere Rouflet. He was with us that day when first I looked upon yonder picture of Manon. A fair and gallant-hearted stripling; a page, as once I had been, at the Royal Court. Like unto myself, he would in time take knighthood upon him; in preparation for which, it had been settled that before long he should remove from Court and become my esquire. As such, the time would doubtless come when he could follow me upon some foray and so gain his spurs. A noble boy;—whom greatly I loved, even as though he were my own brother, and to whom moreover I felt much beholden, by reason of his attachment to and advocacy of myself. For while so many of the race of the De Courtrais would fain have had Cecile abandon my alliance for that of the Duke of Mantua, and with greater or less secresy of purpose had manœuvred against me, Arnulf was one of those few who held themselves steadfast and incorruptible in my behalf. Now meeting me, there was as ready and friendly greeting upon his part as ever before. But as I held his hand, I saw that his mind was ill at ease, the disturbance of it showing in his face as in a mirror.

"'What now, Arnulf?' I said.

"'Nay, I should ask you,' he answered. 'What is this I hear about a quarrel between Cecile and yourself?'

"'Then it is known, Arnulf? Yes,—a silly quarrel, wherein I will admit the wrong was all upon my part. It is to assure her of my consciousness of this, and if it be possible, to bind up the wound that my petulance has caused, that now I am on my way back to the castle.'

"'Alas!' cried Arnulf, 'do you think that the wound can now be healed at all? I fear me, it has gone too deep for that. How, elsewise, can it be; this thing that I am told?'

"'What, Arnulf?'

"'That in some strong resentment, Cecile has sent for the Grand Duke of Mantua to return to her, and has given to him her portrait as gage and proof of love?'

"By all the saints! When this I heard, Pere Rouflet, my heart for the moment stood still,—an icy chill crept over all my limbs. Were this true that Arnulf told me, then most likely had mischief been done that could not ever be undone. I could not chide Cecile,—even at that moment of my heart's sharpest pain, I could merely feel that I had done her such despite that nothing on her part should justly bring down my anger upon her. I could understand, somewhat, the girlish pique and impulse with which she may have acted; and I could even excuse it, so properly was it in accord with every impulse of our common human nature. I had insulted her true affect-

ion; and what more natural than that, in her resentment she should turn for comfort to another? In thus excusing her, it might be that I found the task more easy, by reason of the little real jealousy I felt. I knew that Cecile could not have turned to the Duke with any affection for him in her heart, and that she would never again love man as she had loved me. It was the tearing altogether from her life the power of future love,—the substitution for it of cold rank and state. Therefore I did not think to blame her. But as for him who had come between us—

"'Say you so, Arnulf?' I exclaimed. I think that doing so I laughed aloud; but it must have been a hollow laugh, indeed. 'Say you so? Then as I live! he who has taken advantage of this foolish quarrel to dispossess me, shall die the death of a dog before I let loose my hold upon him.'

"As I spoke we turned the street, having by this time again taken up my way toward the castle. And before us was the beginning of the woodland that extends from the castle walls upon the north unto the river's bank. There was a stone bench beneath an oak tree upon that side, and there all alone the Grand Duke chanced to sit. Said I not aright, Pere Rouflet, when I told you that chance or fate, whether it may be, as our attendant fiend is always ready to forward plans of mischief? In any other mood I might have passed that stone seat a score of times, and found it empty. Now that I longed to meet my enemy that I might wreak my re-

venge upon him, he was sitting there, all ready at my hand. Nay more; he had there come for purpose of love-meditation. For while I stood for a moment unseen, he drew from his doublet, where it lay over his heart, a little case which gleamed so brightly in the falling moonbeam, that I recognized it readily for the silver incased miniature,—gazed fondly upon it for a moment,—then returned it to his bosom. I am but mortal man, Pere Rouflet; and no mortal man could endure this sight in patience. With one quick stride I came forward and stood before him,—so close in front, indeed, that my shadow fell directly across his knee.

"'A word with you, my lord Duke,' I cried. 'You have a picture,—a portrait of one to whom I am betrothed. I cannot suffer, for my sweet honor's sake, that this should be. You must release to me that picture.'

"'One to whom I am betrothed has given that picture to me,' he answered;—scornfully, and yet with a certain grace of courtesy. 'I know not who there may now be with power to make objection. One there once was who might have told me nay, and in all proper right; but he it seems has weakly thrown away the privilege. Know you any such person, Sir Knight? Go to! I will keep the portrait with my life.'

"'With your life then be it,' I replied. And that I might hurry the matter to sudden issue, I raised my hand as though to buffet him upon the cheek. At that movement he started, growing pale with rage;—then arose.

"'It is enough, without the blow itself,' he said. 'That can be understood in all its full intent, as thoroughly as though really given. Therefore,—where and when, Sir Knight? For I am at this moment at your service.'

"For answer, I pointed to the deep shadow of the wood, where the closer gathering of the trees made thicket; and with a courtly bow he followed me. A minute then I led the way, until we came to where there was a small space vacant of all shrubbery. At one side ran a well worn path leading to the nearest river bridge; but for a long space at either side the path was now unoccupied. At the other side the thick forest gathered close around. Overhead was the bright moon, shedding lustre upon the green turf and making every object clear as day.

"'Here we can make our stand, my lord Duke,' I said, unsheathing my sword. He bowed; and drawing also his sword, stood opposite to me. At this there was a momentary delay; for Arnulf now for the first time becoming certain of our intent, flung himself in haste between us,—begging that we would put up our swords,—that we would strive in some other way to accommodate the matter,—that at least we would wait until another time when proper witnesses upon either side could be procured and the conflict carried on under some formal rule. But we were too much in the distemper of hot blood not to be resolved to settle the affair upon the spot; and telling Arnulf that there could be no delay, and that he must serve as witness for us both, we

motioned him from between us and again stood in position of mutual offence.

"'My lord Duke,' I said, while for a moment we remained thus motionless with our swords crossed; 'it is my firm resolve to kill you. Therefore, before you die, take this occasion to send by me your prayer for pardon to the Lady Cecile for having presumed to look with aspiration upon her.'

"'Sir Knight,' he answered,—and I will admit that he spoke with better discrimination of speech than I had shown; 'it is with the fates to determine which of us must die. If my just intent can serve me, it shall be yourself. Confess, therefore, that you have proved yourself unworthy of alliance with beauty such as hers.'

"With that, giving each other no further speech,—for there was no need of response to words that were meant on either side for mere polished insult,—we rapidly engaged; our swords eagerly clashing in their fierce encounter. So for a moment. Then with crafty lunge, I sent his weapon flying from his hand and my own point into his breast. He staggered back, and I thought at first that he had been sped. Lowering then my sword, I waited in silence for him to fall. But he remained still standing, for the instant troublously catching his breath; then unloosed his doublet to ascertain the nature and condition of his hurt. There was no wound at all; but, from the open doublet, fell the little silver cased miniature. There was deep dent of sword-thrust in its side:

proving that this it was, that, like a breastplate, had saved him.

"'Should you not now yield to me all right to its possession, Sir Knight?' he said, gazing upon the picture which lay upon the grass between us, glittering in the soft moonlight.

"'Nay,' I retorted, 'fate has shown that I can rescue it from you,—there remains for me merely to re-accept it.'

"'As I spoke, I stooped to raise it from the ground. But he, putting forward his foot, pressed one corner of the picture so closely that I could not lift it; and at the same time reaching forth his hand one side, he regained his sword and stood again upon the defense. I, lest he might somehow get advantage of me in possession of the picture, placed my foot likewise upon it, and then the combat re-commenced. At first, as before, with full length of sword; but gradually, as we found that with foot of each thus planted upon the miniature we were drawn too close together for distant action, we shortened up our holds, each clasping the upper portion of his blade instead of the hilt, and so continually contracting in the circle of our attack until our combat resembled rather the fight of bravoes with their daggers than of Christian knights with their swords. Meanwhile Arnulf had recognized the picture as his sister's portrait; and in distress that in our blind rage we should be trampling it beneath our feet, he sought to rescue it from that cruel profanation,—stooping down between us at a moment when our

weapons being raise high in air, it seemed that he might safely do so.

"What now shall I say, Pere Rouflet? Or how, indeed, shall I say it at all? I would rather that you should suppose the rest, than be myself obliged to tell it. Is it not clear to you? Well then; there came a moment in this fierce combat when so wildly we struck dagger-fashion at at each other, that we saw Arnulf sink down between us, with half stifled groan. Which one of us, in his hurried movement, had chanced to strike that poor innocent boy? I looked at my adversary's blade, and saw that it still shone brightly in the moonlight; at my own, and shuddered as I noted that its lustre was dimmed and that cruel drops of blood fell from the point. Alas! the bitter fate had been drawn upon myself.

"'Let our combat here end, Sir Knight,' said the Duke, as in dismay we lowered our weapons. 'It befits us not now to continue it. It may be that at some other time we may resume it. For that I am always at your pleasure. Meanwhile, do you remain with this poor boy and render him such assistance as you can, while I repair to the castle for a leech. Perchance the wound may be a trifle after all, and not unto death.'

"Naturally forgoing all thought of further fray, I gave assent; and while the Duke hurried away, I knelt upon the grass and lifted poor Arnulf's head upon my knee. Hoping, indeed, that, as the Duke suggested, the wound might prove a trifle; feeling my heart fail within me as I

saw that my hope was all misplaced. For the life blood was welling in bright stream from Arnulf's heart, and already the dew of dissolution was gathering upon his forehead. Yet did I strive to cherish hope and to encourage him with cheery words, as though by giving him mistaken confidence in his strength, death could be held at bay.

"'Take courage, Arnulf,' I therefore cried. 'Help will soon be here.'

"'Ah, Loys, there can no longer be help for me,' he gasped forth.

"'Say not so, Arnulf. We will be in the field together, dealing our blows right merrily, for many a year to come.'

"'Nay, Loys,—not for me; that thing I know full well. Lean over nearer to me.' I leaned further forward, and he threw one arm about my neck and drawing my face still closer to him, kissed me upon the cheek. Me, Pere Rouflet, the one who slew him! Alas! the friendly caress was his farewell to me in life. 'I know, Loys,' he whispered, 'that it was your hand which struck me; but I know, also, that it was through accident you did it. Think not that I could bear malice by reason of it. Do you not know the legend,—that not one generation can pass away, without a Courtrai being slain by a Martelle? It must needs be so; and now your part has been fulfilled without blame or reproach to yourself. Better so than if you had been fated to go on for years with that doom hanging over you, to be carried out at last in hot blood and with more direct purpose.'

"So, Pere Rouflet, he spoke; though not all at once or in as clear sequence as I have given it; for at times his speech would be broken and threaten altogether to fail, and there were other times when he would pause with pain, with difficulty finding breath. Nor did he speak in those exact words that I have used, for I cannot remember all he said. That was the meaning and purport of his speech, however; and when he had finished, I saw too plainly that all was almost over. I leaned over still more closely and pressed my own farewell kiss upon his cheek,—for the moment his arm tightened about my neck in apparent response and acknowledgement,—then relaxed and fell from around me;—and so he died.

"Pere Rouflet, I would have given my life for his. What was I that I should live; having already, by a few foolish reckless words, destroyed all my destined career? But he, so young and fair, with the world opening bright before him, urging him to go on and win plenteous honors, —why was it that he of the two must be the one to die? For a moment I continued to hold his lifeless head upon my lap; then gently removing it, placed it upon the soft grass and arose to my feet. Looking down at that fair young face, even in death smiling upward at the softly glowing moon, I felt that I should have died in his stead, —that in losing such fond affection as his, I had lost everything,—that fate had now done her worst and there could not be anything more cruel for me in store. Yet even there I was mistaken.

"For, as I now stood erect and cast my eyes around, awaiting the succor which could never have come otherwise than too late, I saw a strange and startling thing. Whether it were my own baleful imagination that acting upon my disordered mind now led me astray, or whether it was the actual presence of the attendant fiend that so successfully had compassed my destruction and now had one more buffet left for me, I cannot tell. I think, indeed, that it must have been the latter; so cunningly and not by chance did everything seem to arrange itself for my further tribulation. Be that as it may, I saw advancing upon the path that led past the grove and towards the city, a small frail figure in gray hood and dress as of a religeuse. The same deceptive figure that I had once seen clinging to the iron bar outside the convent door, and had then gazed upon with such strange suggestion of Manon's figure. Doubtless the same creative presentment of the fiend that had appeared to Cecile for our mutual misunderstanding. And as I gazed, the figure raised its head, looking upward with partially turned face so that the moonlight fell broadly upon it; and I saw that not in figure only but in every feature and expression as well, it was counterfeit of Manon. Slowly while I gazed, it passed along the path, still looking upward, nor seeming to notice me as there I stood;—so glided onward while, for the moment, I stood transfixed,—then disappeared behind the curving of the path.

'Then suddenly I recovered my suspended faculties, and

with them, all my spirit to do and dare. What reason to stand thus a prey to morbid fancies or to fiendish wiles? Be it distempered imagining or devilish apparition, I would follow and face it down. At once there should be an end of nerveless fear and lack of knightly purpose. So hurrying away and along the path, I strove to overtake the figure and hold communion with it.

"Yet all in vain, Pere Rouflet. I followed far, yet saw it not again,—it might be that it had vanished into thin air,—it might be that it had mingled with the groups of wayfarers that became more frequent as I approached the city; whatever it might be, I could not regain sight of it. And so I returned to the place of my late conflict, pondering much upon what I had seen, and now dreading lest during my short departure, assistance might have come and found me absent from my post."

"And so it was, Sir Knight?" said Pere Rouflet, foreseeing the new disaster.

"Even so. While I was still some distance away, though in sight once more of our battle ground, I saw advancing from the other side, with flaming torches, a large and constantly increasing group of the Courtrai retainers. I beheld them gather around the deserted corse of Arnulf, and for the moment gaze awe-struck and silent upon his pale, upturned face. I heard the loud torrent of oaths and curses and foul vituperation that then burst forth against myself, who should properly have been present to await the succor they had hoped to bring; but who alas!

seemingly with cruel purpose, had left the poor boy to die alone!

"What could I say or do? It were useless to face that angry crowd and tell them that Arnulf was already dead when I had abandond him. It were a childish thing to think that I could make them comprehend that I had been drawn aside by impulse to follow fiend or spectre. It were a rash and self destroying thing to approach that group at all with intent to make any explanation whatever; knowing full well, that in their present wrathful temper, I should have no time given me for argument at all, but that before I could have said a word in extenuation, a score of thirsty swords would pierce my throat. For an instant I thought to advance and meet my doom, and so at once have the whole trouble ended. But I am young, Pere Rouflet; and to the young, life even in the midst of troubles has its charms. There yet might be some happy career open before me, if this stress of cruel circumstance were once passed safely through. And so, reaction came to my first intention; and seized almost with panic, I turned and fled.

"Away along that beaten path and towards the city. A moment more, and I heard the shouts of those behind, who in wide dispersion of their forces sought for me. I could see the torches gleaming through the woods,—could mark by the outcry that there were some who had chanced upon my track. Increasing my speed, I gained the bridge and crossed the river; and now among the

city throng, I could for a moment take breath, and consider upon what course to follow. To turn into my own lodging would be the extreme of rashness, for there at once I would be sought for. To wander through the streets would be little better, for soon the pursuit would be carried into the city bounds. To seek some obscure street among thieves and vagabonds, where my purse would gain me temporary concealment was little to my taste. Meanwhile, as I anticipated, even as I paused for reflection, the tidings of my misdeeds were borne across the bridge, and the hue and cry for my blood arose on all sides in increasing volume, and the light of other torches gleamed here and there along the walls and far down the streets, showing how diligently I was sought for, and at last there seemed no safety left for me anywhere.

"Suddenly, however, I heard my name called,—not in wrath but in joyful greeting. Turning, I saw a single man-at-arms advancing open handed, as to my embrace. It was one who had fought at my side many months ago, had believed me dead as others had done, and now hailed me with joy as one newly awakened from the tomb.

"'Stand back, Barbloche,' I cried, in spirit of justice to him, and not willing to lead him blindly into mischief on my account. 'Come not near me until you hear all. I have slain a man, and now those who are of his kin and party seek my life.'

"'I care not whether you have killed the King, good master,' he said. 'If you had done so, I know that it

would have been for proper reason, and that is enough for me. I have been sick unto death from a wound, and for the first time am abroad ; but there is yet some strength left in me for a blow in defense of my gallant captain. Where, now, are those who would take your life ? '

" For answer I pointed down the street, where a group of armed men with torches cut off all flight in that direction. Therefore, to escape them,—for now Barbloche proposed taking me to his own lodging where, for a while, none might be apt to find me,—we turned in the other direction ; but even there had not advanced far before we beheld other pursuers before us. Then down a narrow lane between the two parties ; but being now seen, were quickly sought to be headed off. In fine, good Pere, it was not long before we were caught like flies in a mesh between two bands of pursuers ; and being obliged to cut our way through one of them at least, were soon engaged in mortal affray.

" It lasted, as matter of course, for not many minutes. I cut down one of the foremost assailants and Barbloche struck down a second. Then there came one who, taking him unaware at his left side, pierced his heart so that at once he fell. I saw the mishap and that the wound was mortal. Alas the fury of knowing that ! Was it ever to be ordered that my best and truest friends should perish through my means or in my cause ? First Arnulf—pure hearted and noble boy, striken down by my own hand ; then Barbloche, true and brave man-at-arms, only cured

of long and wearisome illness to fall in the first hour of his release, for my poor sake. Transported with mad fury, I struck out wildly hither and thither, doing good execution among my increasing assailants ; killing none of them, it may be, but grievously wounding more than one. Yet were they all too many for me ; and I should soon have been sped, had not Barbloche with his last breath come to my assistance.

" ' The church, master,—the church ! ' he cried.

" Even as he spoke he fell back dead ; and I, glancing behind, noticed for the first time that I stood before the cathedral and had fought my way into the very shadow of the porch. To give one farewell stroke which cut down my man but shivered my weapon,—then to turn and flee within,—this was merely a moment's action. And so, Pere Rouflet, that is all my story, and here I am ; and as my right, I ask for sanctuary until my own friends can be rallied for my defense."

" Sanctuary you can have, Sir Knight, as I have already said ; and for a right, as well. But put off your sword, however. No one should dare to approach the altar with warlike weapon in his hand. Shall I take and preserve it for you ? "

For a moment Sir Loys clutched his sword more tightly, as though reluctant to have it taken from him and unwilling to be left entirely defenceless. He remembered that there had been instances where even the altar steps had not restrained the vengeful passions of men ; and he

dreaded lest that profanation might happen now and he be cut down like a dog, without a single weapon for protection. But further reflection determined him. He could not go again into the public ways, for there his enemies were watching for him. And it was years since the sanctuary of the church had been outraged, though men stained with the foulest and most treacherous acts had claimed it. Moreover, what protection could there be, in any event, through that broken blade?

"Take it then, Pere Rouflet," he said, unbuckling the scabbard and handing that and the shattered weapon to the other. "In truth it can be of little further use, save as trophy of not unknightly defence."

CHAPTER XV.

PERE ROUFLET turned away with a sigh, and Loys de Martelle was left alone. At the moment his thoughts were none of the most cheering. He felt that he had been placed by strange combination of circumstances under a ban which among his enemies could find no forgiveness,—that however he might be protected in that sanctuary for a day or even for a week, the time might arrive in which he would be forced by hunger or the desperation of weariness to venture again into the world,—that for months to come, were he to tarry there so long, his enemies would be clustered about him, watching and guarding every avenue of escape. What then could he do?

Nothing; except to sit for hour after hour devising plans for escape, each of which, almost the next moment, was thrown aside as impracticable. Meanwhile, as time went on, the great cathedral grew if possible yet darker. The corbel heads above, for a while faintly visible in the reflected moonlight, entirely vanished from sight,—the arches spanning the air from nave to transept became

only dimly distinguishable, appearing like mere threads of moulding separating the space between indistinct confusion and impenetrable blackness. The only light of a cheering nature which could now be seen came from far down the long nave and beyond the doorway, where the glitter of a silversmith's shop opposite the cathedral threw a faint beam across the narrow street. Upon this light Loys now dreamily fixed his gaze. By it, he saw the forms of people passing to and fro along the way. Now it was a group of belated workwomen hurrying homeward. Now it was a courtier preceded by a link boy bearing a flaming torch. And again it was a band of noisy young blades swaggering along with wild and reckless yells. As the fugitive strained his gaze forward, he felt that, noble and court gallant as he was, he could with advantage exchange his state for that of the meanest of those passing on in such abundant freedom. Then for the instant he wondered whether in the thick darkness he could not steal forth and evade pursuit, and with this hope he half resolved to make the attempt. But at that very moment he saw, in clear relief against the bright doorway of the silversmith's shop, two stalwart forms arrayed in casques and breastplates and bearing naked rapiers in their hands; and he fell back despairingly, with recognition of the fact that his enemies were argus-eyed and had left no avenue for escape.

Thrown back upon sad and bitter realization of a hapless lot; and yet not for long. Youth is elastic in its

impulses and well disposed to cheerful thought, if but the slightest gleam of encouragement thereto be afforded. As Loys de Martelle drew back again towards the region of the choir, he began to reason within himself that after all his situation was not altogether desperate. He had slain one whom he had greatly loved; yet this had been by dire mischance, and though he could never lose his recollection of the deed or cease to sorrow over it, there could not remain that weight upon the conscience which a deliberate and wilful bloodshed would impose. The rage of a powerful family and its cry for vengeance were incited fiercely against him; yet these might in time cool down, as opportunity was given for him to explain the accidental nature of the deed. Moreover, though he were poor in estate and thereby in the number of his retainers, yet being of high lineage he must needs have many friends who would take his part and demand that neither in person or reputation he should be wronged. Cecile he must lose forever,—that must of course be understood, seeing that there was this stain of fraternal blood between them; yet had his affection for her never been of such depth that he should now eat out his heart for longing after her, and the world was very wide and there must be others in it whom he could love as well and better. It therefore all came to this,—in his more cheerful current of reflection,—that he must wait awhile and secure his freedom, then bid farewell to present scenes and carry his sword into other lands,

where perchance he might yet carve out new fortune and honor for himself. No such great hardship after all, in that.

Thus easily giving comfort to himself, he lay down in a secluded corner of one of the transepts and sought for sleep. The gentle visitant came to him almost at his first wish. The hard pavement was not in truth much harder or more cold than where he had often slept before beleaguered castle ; and now, even as then, his bodily weariness made him think lightly of mere personal hardship. So, like a tired child he fell into peaceful slumber ; and as though he were indeed a child, pleasant dreams wove their bright fancies about him.

Even as in the past days he had dreamed of Manon, so now again she came before him. Tender, sweet and loving as ever, and with nothing that could give even a suspicion of ill faith and heartlessness. Her face bent over his,—her fingers toying caressingly in his locks,—kind and gentle words were those she breathed into his ear, trustful and affectionate was the glance she fastened upon him, in every attitude and expression there was assurance of unfaltering devotion. In her presence he felt that every element for happiness was complete,—that nothing else which the world could offer need give him a longing thought. If for the moment Cecile came into his mind, —as in the dream she now chanced to come,—he thought upon her only as one to whom he was bound in gilded slavery, but whom, being so far away, he need

not now regard or suffer to obtrude in interruption of his present bliss. And so at last he awoke, with that pleasant dream still woven in his thoughts.

"Strange that I cannot drive her from my mind," he muttered to himself, as he began to recover perception of where he was. "Always, too, the same,—beauteous and loving as when first I met her. Why in my dreams cannot I preserve that better realization of her perfidy, of which my wakeful reasoning has assured me?"

Rising to his feet he looked around, and strove to pierce the darkness. The moon had set; and now there was no outward gleam of light to assist in breaking up the obscurity. It was near the coming of morn, however; and this could be told by that faint lightening of the gloom, which taking something from the full intensity of the darkness, here and there allowed faint revelation of most prominent objects. Something, indeed, of the more intense blackness of the atmosphere was now gone, as though faint motes of gray had been sprinkled through it; and the white pavement below was beginning to project itself into sight as though being lifted up from some unfathomable depth. From this, the heavy gray pillars could be seen springing aloft; yet, for the moment, making slight ascent, however, being soon lost in the upper gloom. But almost at once, so rapidly did the new order of events assume its place, the outlines of the gray pillars gained extension, little by little becoming yet higher revealed; as though subject to some actual steady growth

until they reached at last their full development of height, in sculptured capital and thence in springing arch. And now the fine gray motes of light working themselves more densely through the darkness, the blackness altogether gave place to gray, and pillar and arch began to stand more accurately revealed ; and grinning corbel heads and foliated capitals sprang into fuller sight through the gloom, each moment more clearly manifesting their weird tracery ; and the long nave and aisles seemed to grow in length, even as the pillars had made upward progression ; and dotting here and there the long extent, white marble tombs and effigies gleamed out ; and a soft pearly tint began to steal in at every window, manifesting thus the rambling outline of the gothic tracery, but not as yet of the stained glass decoration ;—and so the day began to dawn.

"Manon,—ever Manon!" repeated Loys. "Is there to be no relief from this cruel fancy, but must I always carry one unworthy object in my mind,—feeling my weak inclination at constant variance with my mature reason?"

The light of dawn increased ; and gazing up, he saw the great rear window before him,—now fully revealed in its mere shape and outline, but as yet, in all its intermediate decoration, an indistinguishable confusion. Seeing this, Loys now laughed aloud.

"In truth," he said, "it seems as though in this place there were safety not only for my body but for my mind as well. Elsewhere, I must need, carry in my heart

only regretful longings for the return of a baleful past; here, at least, I can contemplate the object of those longings with truer judgment and with more accurate perception of her real unworthiness. It is something, after all, to be where I can hold her image always before me; so as to be able, at the instant, to look up and correct each morbid fancy."

Again giving vent to bitter laughter, he stood at the outside of the choir and gazed up at the great window. And now to his surprise he saw that during the last moment, from whence he knew not, there had come between himself and the window, a single figure. The figure of a man who stood motionless and silent, gazing up in the same direction with himself, absorbed in some deep thought, apparently, and seemingly unaware that he was not sole occupant of the cathedral. An instant more, and Loys recognized in this motionless figure, Pere Rouflet.

Like unto himself, the Priest had passed the night in dreams; but as it chanced, they were visions of evil and disturbing import. Strange, indeed, that it should be so; but as the world at large has its eccentricities, so in dreamland are there vagaries unaccountable. The fugitive from wrath, with bloodshed upon his memory and ruin dogging all his steps, had slept the sleep of innocence and pleasant imageries, so readily had the usages of the world enabled him to look upon troubles of all kind with partial equanimity; on the other hand the secluded priest, unused to any thoughts or actions beyond the cloister life, was borne

down with anguish by reason of the consciousness of one act of seeming sacrilege. In the practice of his art he had done despite not only to the memory of a trustful friend, but also to the dignity of the prototype that friend had been; how could he ever be pardoned for either offence?

In his dreams he had not, like the Knight, remained bound down to circumstance of earth; but,—whether as mortal man or as disembodied spirit he could not tell,—he had felt himself wafted away through darkened and illimitable space. At the first, it had seemed as though he were all alone. Near him was neither form nor shadow of any other being; for he could mark the distant stars gleaming cold and cheerless, with no obscuration by intervening object. So for a little while. Then, rather through some inate perception than from outward observation, there came to him the sense of being surrounded by other forms,—a feeling of being no longer alone. Yet for a while he could see no one. Gradually, however, the gloom began to brighten, the stars to pale away into indistinctness and little by little altogether to vanish; and then, he knew not whence, there came an ever increasing brightness. With that, he began to discern that there were myriads of shadowy forms about him,—every instant more and more clearly growing out of their first faintness of hue,—at last appearing white robed and glorious,—not winged, indeed, as his waking fancy might have portrayed, but seeming to be floating

onward, by means of some mystic volition of their own,—ever speeding through endless space in the same direction with himself. Continuing thus for a period which might have been moments or years, so little did he retain the power to take the measurement of time ; and then these myriads, pausing in their direct flight, seemed to turn aside and circle around one central object. Around a figure white robed and glorious like themselves ; standing upon fleecy clouds, erect and motionless. Was this his patron saint Clotilde, or was it Manon ? He could not tell ; for it bore the same impress of serene loveliness that his art had made equally the attribute of either. He only knew that the countenance was unutterably sweet, compassionate and beautiful,—in far greater degree than his imagination had hitherto been able to conceive, ten thousand times more than his poor pencil had been able to portray. Standing thus alone in her ineffable beauty of attitude and expression, she seemed to gaze with kindly grace and benignity upon each member of the circling throng. He, too, following the others in that constant round, sought to attract her gaze ; for, as it appeared to him, he had been oppressed the while with fear and trembling,—bearing upon him the weight of some great sin, the nature of which he could not bring to recollection ; and he thought that if he could only for a moment sun himself in the effulgence of her smile, he might be forgiven for the sin, whatever it might be. Three times he passed around the circle, seeking her kindly glance in

vain. Then at last she turned towards him ; and as her eye met his own in recognition, he saw that her expression changed at once, her smile began to lose its character of sweet benevolence, her gaze to grow cold, her whole aspect scornful and forbidding ; in all respect she seemed to resolve herself by successive steps into another being, even as he had so wantonly portrayed the changes and downfall of her pure nature upon the great window of the cathedral. Then, with one flash of thought he remembered what had been his sin. And with broken sob choking his utterance, he had awakened.

Awakened to remember what he had done the evening before,—to wonder how far his hasty action might have transformed his masterpiece,—whether it had restored it to itself or irrecoverably had ruined it,—whether his fault hereafter would lie in the first alteration of it or in its total destruction. Like Sir Loys, Pere Rouflet had seen by the faint gray motes of light mingling with the deeper darkness, that the day was about to break ; and urged by an impatience and anxiety that nothing could subdue he had arisen, with intent to repair at once to the cathedral, and by the very first gleam of morning to learn how far his invading hand had been productive of good or evil. And having let himself into the church by the little side door leading through his studio, he now stood between the picture and the Knight, unknowingly hindering in part Sir Loys' projected contemplation of it. Nor did he think how near the other stood, until

he felt himself lightly touched upon the shoulder.

"You are up betimes, Pere Rouflet," said the Knight. "Is it always thus, that you arise before the dawn to contemplate your masterpiece?"

Hearing who spoke, Pere Rouflet shuddered. Most unaccountably in last night's dreams or speculations about the picture, it had escaped his memory that whatever the result of his hasty work upon it, Sir Loys would be there to see. And what upon Sir Loys would be the effect of its restoration, or what more perfect safety to himself might there not be even in its destruction? Between that wanton injury to art and the replacement of its original beauty, how now to choose?

"I have rested ill, Sir Knight," Pere Rouflet answered. "Therefore it is I am so early aroused."

"Ill rested, you say? So has it not been with me. Lo! I have had sweet and consoling dreams, as though I were a child lying upon its mother's breast. Yet what may be the benefit of that, so long as I am awakened to anxiety,—or what, perhaps, the evil of unruly dreams to yourself, if you arouse at last to calm and soothing occupations? It comes to this, indeed, that friendly or unfriendly visions have brought us to the same pass."

"And how, Sir Knight?"

"Why, simply that we are now standing side by side in front of yonder painting, and equally striving to gather peace from it. See you not in what several ways? You, that you may disperse the sullen and frightful humors of

the night, by contemplation of artistic excellences that owe to you their creation; for none can doubt that, in spite of what I find amiss, there is great beauty in the painting. And I, that by dwelling remorselessly upon the picture's most flagrant omissions and defects and its abounding revelations of attributes of character to be despised, I may repulse those morbid impulses and longings that, despite my reason, fret my soul. Which being so, Pere Rouflet, let us stand as men united in common purpose, and await that broader glow of dawn which shall satisfy both our desires and interests."

"It may happen," murmured Pere Rouflet, "that we shall both have our purposes fulfilled; and yet it may not be, as well. Do you not realize, Sir Knight, that much of our ability to understand art aright, either in adulation or disparagement, may often be influenced by the prevailing tenor of our mind? That if we are in passing charitable mood, our kindly criticism may then be so greatly exercised that—"

"Think you so, Pere Rouflet?" the other interrupted, with a harsh laugh. "Nay, if you fear lest now my mood of mind should be constrained in favor of yonder image, be reassured. Never yet have I felt so strongly the necessity of taking close, unsparing and unforgiving note of every line and hue that can still more amply than ever before arouse my perfect enmity and complete my disinthralment. See, already the sun must be near its rising, and the outline of the figure begins

at last to grow into shape and semblance of womanhood."

"It is so, Sir Knight,"—and in his apprehension Pere Rouflet's heart sank heavily within him. "Yes, even now the outline begins to appear before us. Think you not—now that more collectedly we can study the real merit of my work,—that in this outline there is something forced and strained,—a lack of that grace and harmony which once, in our more prejudiced eyes, we imagined there to exist?"

"Nay, good Pere; in so much, at least, you wrong yourself. Whatever may be the admitted defects in countenance and expression of your saint, in attitude it is surely unapproachable. There is nothing therein constrained or unnatural,—in that, there is every attribute of glorious majesty,—there is exceeding loveliness,—were this figure all, and were it as suggestive of Manon as is the face, why then indeed——Look! even while I speak, the light has grown stronger and the face is beginning to brighten into some distinctness of outline. A feature here and a line there,—and soon we shall find portrayed the whole expression of it, as well."

"Soon indeed, Sir Knight; and with all its seeming lack of loving sympathy. Will it not pain you to look longer? Retire therefore, and do not let your eyes rest further upon it. Be content with the sight of figure and attitude, since those so amply satisfy you; and do not compel yourself to search for those other

attributes which cannot fail to be displeasing to you."

"Why look you, Pere Rouflet! Have I not already told you that the utmost of my present need is to await with eager expectancy the painting's full revelation of heartlessness and perfidy? To feast my gaze unrelentingly upon this exact picturing of selfish nature and cold calculation, so that thereby I may the better wean myself from that weak spirit of relenting that in my lonely moments so constantly threatens to betray my manhood's self respect? Therefore must I stay. Now see again. The light grows stronger still, and more and more the features are projected into distinctness. The eyes, at one time seeming to me so filled with loving tenderness,—the lips with their soft curve, once deemed by me almost seraphic in their gentle smile;—even now, something of their olden expression lingers around them, bringing back their former charm, and despite my present knowledge, bidding fair to cheat me into renewed faith. It may be that it needs yet stronger light to bring into plainer sight those unworthy traits of character which only my late disinthralment has revealed to me. For lack of that bright sunshine, must I be baulked of my projected renewal of comforting scorn and hate? Will the sun remain all day wrapped in clouds and thereby make my wakening fancies a mere continuation of my dreams and still betray my judgment into weakness?"

Even as the Knight thus spoke, the sun bursting from the thick veil of cloud in which it had arisen, poured its

resplendent glories through the stained window in gleam of wondrous beauty. And gazing upward, Sir Loys beheld the great masterpiece of art, restored as it had been a month before,—bright and brilliant with gold and purple —not one line of its surpassing excellence obscured,—not one impress of loveliness impaired,—glorious as ever before, in every expression of serenity, grace and peace. The bended head seemed inclined towards him with kindly recognition,—the soft dovelike eyes to gaze upon him with loving approbation,—the lips to whisper pardon for anything that he had thought or done amiss,—the folded hands to call him to herself. It was indeed his long lost Manon once more beaming upon him with ineffable outpouring of love.

Bewildered and perplexed, the Knight for a moment gazed up in speechless wonderment,—then, in spirit of mute inquiry, turned his eyes fixedly upon Pere Rouflet. What there he saw was not surprise like unto his own, but rather pale betrayal of nervous terror,—a sinking back as though anticipating angry outbreak,—eyes raised in imploring supplication as though begging remission for a detected sin,—in all, the impress of one weighed down with abject remorse and apprehension. At once and as by an inspiration, the whole great mystery stood revealed. The subtle steps by which he had been led into cruel ill-faith and scorn,—the nervous haste with which at times Pere Rouflet had hurried him from his contemplation of the painting, doubtless thereby to avoid all chance of un-

fortunate encounter,—the little gray clad figure at the convent gate and the passing figure of the night before, neither of them after all merely a thing of chance resemblance or of ghostly fancy,—all these came upon him in flood of recollection, and plainly told the story of long continued studiously contrived deception.

"Pere Rouflet," he thundered forth, laying his hand so heavily upon the shoulder of the other as almost to crush his frail figure to the pavement, "you have deceived and played with me! Manon is yet alive and true to me. Were you other than you are, by all the saints! you should answer with your life for this."

CHAPTER XVI.

"NAY, harm him not," at that instant cried a voice behind the Knight. Turning, Sir Loys beheld a small, quiet figure in garb which for the moment he did not recognize, except to note that it was in somewhat singular and questionable taste. The man himself was middle aged and with smoothly shaven face, whereby full prominence was given to its saturnine expression, somewhat relieved by twinkle of the eyes suggestive of latent capability of humor.

"Lay not your hand upon him," the man continued. "Can you find no better food for wrath, but that you must attack the very priest at the altar? Has your heart not already had its fill of slaughter, but that even here you must stretch forth the red hand? See! he upon whom you would have wreaked your vengeance is not worthy of the trouble, even were he not a shaveling. For lo! how now he steals trembling away and takes refuge in the shelter of his sacristy."

"And who are you that would dictate my conduct to me?" asked the Knight.

"One whom you have lately seen, but do not remember, inasmuch as he is of such lowly condition compared with yourself," the other answered. "Lowly, indeed, as he then lay beneath your steed's hoofs and crawled out thence with chance of a bruise or two," he continued with a chuckle. "Yet of that I do not complain,—of a certainty I bear no malice. You do not know who I am, comrade? See then if this will bring me to your august recollection."

With that, the man shook the folds of his short tunic, and thereby gave note of tinkling bells which until that moment had been hanging silent. Then he plucked from his breast a tall cloth cap, also trimmed with little bells; and dragging the cap over his ears, waggishly shook his head from side to side, causing the bells to ring merrily in concert with those upon his tunic.

"You know me now, comrade? The Fool of the Grand Duke of Mantua, at your service."

"And being so, are you here to do me injury? Has it come to this, that you have been sent,—as one of too little sense to find a sin in violation of sanctity,—to work your master's will upon me? Is it with a fool's truncheon that I am to be put to death, as one unworthy of knightly sword or even of hired bravo?"

"Nay, nay; you speak in merriment, both as regards yourself and me. As to my matter of little wit, I think that you are not unknowing of the fact that a Court Fool is only a fool when in direct line of his duty; and that to

be a proper fool requires more than enough brains to serve for successful courtier. And as for the power to work an injury upon you,—know, indeed, that I am now rather your comrade in misfortune, asking sympathy and brotherly friendship."

"And how?"

"In this wise, indeed. You should be well aware that though a Fool is privileged to say whatever he pleases, there is a limitation to it, after all, and he must be discreet enough to utter his jests at no unseasonable hour. Otherwise, for want of such discretion, mischief may ensue. Hence, when yester evening I met the Duke, my master, coming towards his lodging, and knew not as yet that he had had affray with yourself, I chose an unpropitious moment for a passing jibe, and I saw the fierce anger at once arise upon his countenance. 'Hang me up that Fool!' he gave order to his chief of archers. By my faith! I felt for the minute in sore strait; and when the archers seized me, I began to repent me greatly for my past sins, more especially for the sin of that last dangerous jest. But when my lord's back was turned, easily I slipped through their hands. In truth they knew too well to proceed to extremity upon me; seeing that the Duke would on the morrow readily forget his wrath, and would most likely visit vengeance upon them should they have taken him at his first hasty word and thereby have put out of the world the most wise Fool in Italy. And yet—"

"Yet what, would you say?"

"In faith, comrade, when I learned a little after, what had happened, I began to think that perchance this time his anger might take longer in the cooling than at certain times before; and therefore, for better assurance of the safety of my neck, I have this morning fled to sanctuary. It will be for a day or two, perhaps; then will I come forth and take my accustomed place unquestioned, and for a while will strive to conduct my conversation with more proper discreetness."

"And I," responded Loys, "will hope by such time to be myself released."

The Jester paused for a moment's thought, then slowly shook his head, first taking off his cap and putting it away inside his tunic, so that the bells should not by their ringing disturb the gravity of his opinion.

"I know not how all that may turn out, comrade," he said. "I am not one of those who believe you to have done that deed with malice; but then, being a Fool, I am one who can exercise his own opinion. Were I a simple courtier or man-at-arms, I must needs carry my duty to the point of believing as do all the others."

"And that is—"

"Hearken, comrade, if you would know the truth. When yesterday I crawled out from beneath your steed's hoofs, I thought for the moment how fine a thing it was to be a titled noble, with privilege to ride over whom he pleased,—how poor a thing to be a Fool and have no

power to resent it. But now, in truth, I would not change places with you. For unless by mistake, there is little hope for you to leave this place alive, considering what all men say."

"And what may that be, indeed?"

"That you struck down the young de Courtrai with deliberate purpose, though in pretence of accident,—wishing thus to avenge yourself for some fancied participation by him in breach of contract with his sister. That when he lay wounded and might have recovered if you had tended him until assistance came, you departed from his side and left him alone to bleed to death. That is the story they all tell, comrade. That I for one believe it not can be nothing to the purpose. It is sufficient that all the others do; it being well understood, though not expressed, that nothing should be neglected which, for purposes of the Italian alliance, may serve to make permanent the breach between the Martelles and Courtrais."

"Say you so?" responded the Knight; and it could be seen that the intelligence gave a more sombre cast to his thoughts than anything which had gone before, though still he strove to pluck up heart. "These are not pleasant tidings, indeed. Yet there is nothing in them which should dismay me, after all; seeing that I have plenteous friends and adherents of my own to rally round me, and who will not in the end allow my fair fame to be abused."

So saying, the Knight strolled away, feeling that there was something repugnant in the other's familiarity of address, even though it was not meant in unfriendly spirit, and bore little more than the customary license allowed to the conversation of a professed Court Fool. Therefore he passed on to the other side; and suddenly, the morning air being chilly, he began to feel in his right arm a sharp, shooting pain. Placing his hand upon the spot, he detected a clammy, cold, sticky substance, while his fingers bore red stains when he removed them. Then for the first time he realized that in the encounter of the previous evening he had been wounded; unknowingly while the excitement of conflict had lasted, but now in the calmness of reflection and with his blood chilled by the tomblike currents of air that circled throughout the building, becoming aroused to the knowledge of his new misfortune. It was merely a flesh wound, indeed, not dangerous if properly treated; but for all that, through the neglect of the past few hours, was destined to cause him much suffering. Every moment the pains increased and tormenting thirst began to parch his lips. Unloosing his sash he endeavored to bind up the wound; but having only his left hand to work with, was foiled for a while in each attempt,—the scarf continually slipping aside. Still, after a time, he succeeded in binding it about him with some approach to stability; then searched for some retired position whence he could observe all that transpired, without being himself too readily seen by others.

There was a corner of one of the transepts so environed by pillars and cumbrous mouldings and projecting monuments that it was dark when elsewhere all was light. Thither he retired ; and in that obscurity standing against the broad base of a pillar, looked forth upon the outward world, awaiting with hopeful assurance the coming of his own friends to his relief. It was time that they should manifest themselves ; for the sun, now risen higher, had chased the shadows from every dark crevice of the arches, the huge bronze doors had already been thrown open, and the throng of passers-by in the street beyond could be seen momentarily increasing in volume.

Now and then, some humble devotee separated herself from this widening current, entered the cathedral and knelt down upon the pavement, remaining there for many minutes in impassioned fervor of devotion, and seemingly unwilling ever to quit the sacred place. Then, more speedy and alert in their devotions came others of higher degree ; some retainer of the Court complacently adjusting the curve of the white plume upon his velvet bonnet, while he muttered hasty prayer, and taking good care to walk out by the side of the handsome maid who had chanced to worship near him, and was not unwilling to let him pour his fulsome adulations into her ear,—or some old noble gallantly escorting a painted dowager, and stopping at the door to offer her upon his finger's tip, and with his most obsequious display of style and grace, the holy water. And after these, others again of low degree,—ar-

tisans in their leathern aprons or groups of peasants in coarse garments and clattering wooden shoes. Soon, there were fifty people, more or less devoutly mumbling their prayers throughout the building. Not one of these, however, cast a glance upon the fugitive leaning against the pillar and gazing around him. In his isolation from them, he seemed as much alone and thrown off from all human communication as though he had lain down in a desert to die.

Now and again, however, others came in ; not to go through their devotions, but only to gratify their hate or curiosity. These persons the Knight instinctively knew, the moment they entered. They did not steal in tremblingly, faltering beneath the impression which the sanctity of the place was wont to make upon hearts attuned to feelings of reverential awe ; but they stepped across the threshold as coolly as though entering their own homes and at once gazed inquiringly about them in search of the object of their coming. From this public scrutiny, Loys would have given worlds to be able to retire, but he had no other resource than to remain and endure it. Now it was a student with his cap set jauntily on the side of his head, who making the circuit of the cathedral and at last finding him whom he sought, stood for a moment looking upon him with scornful gaze. Then came a knight of the Court, bearing upon his cap the insignia of the Courtrais, and with quiet glance swiftly swept the place to be assured that the fugitive had not escaped. Recog-

nizing him at last still standing against the pillar, he glared defiance, significantly touched the hilt of his sword, drew it half forth from the scabbard, let it fall back again with a clash and haughtily departed. Again it was a group of children who had heard of the encounter of the night before; and who, now softly entering, stole slowly nearer and nearer to the actor in the scene, pointed him out to each other, whispered their comments, and so remained for minutes, which to the fugitive seemed hours. None of these persons either in act or sympathy seemed friends of Sir Loys. Could it be true, then, as the Court Fool had hinted, that there was a current of popular condemnation which would make even his own adherents stand aloof?

Thus filled with foreboding thoughts, which constantly increased in power and intensity as the long hours passed and brought not even whisper of active practical sympathy, the Knight stood concealed behind his pillar. Morning and afternoon slowly slipped away; and at last once more the soft twilight began to close in about the gray sculptured walls and to deepen into evening. A few last rays of the setting sun gleamed through the stained glass of the windows, fell broadspread upon the marbled pavement of the nave and flooded the tesselated blocks with segments of gold and purple light; for a moment continuing bright and dazzling, then flickering in their glow with uncertain action, and at last gently fading away. In the arches above, the gloom fast thickening until cornice and groin

grew more and more indistinct,—the delicate stone tracery of the huge capitals becoming blended into confused, unmeaning masses,—the grim sculptured heads that gazed down from the spring of the arches seeming stamped with more than their ordinary grotesque expression, and so retiring still further into the ever deepening darkness. Then the light shone out from the silversmith's little shop on the other side, and the last worshippers began to leave the cathedral,—so the shadows of evening gradually stole in about the scene.

The great bronze doors were not yet closed for the night, and the hum of voices in the street was very pleasant to the imprisoned man. It made him more deeply sigh for freedom, and he wondered whether he might not at last glide forth into the open air unperceived. The thought might be worth the trial, at least. Perhaps his guard might have remitted their watchfulness; or perhaps when so many persons had passed in and out half shrouded in the darkness, the form of one more person leaving might elude observation. So Sir Loys slowly and cautiously approached the door and peeped forth. The way seemed clear of enemies; and with a heart bounding with hope, he took a step onward into the street. But, at this moment a single figure which had remained crouching behind the nearest buttress started forward, drawing a short dagger as he did so. At a whistle others emerged from retired corners, and the baffled fugitive beheld six or eight sturdy armed

men preparing to dispute his flight the moment he had fully emerged. With a muttered exclamation of disappointment, he re-entered the cathedral which never had appeared to him so gloomy as after that faint perception of the soft evening air, and retired once more to his nook beside the transept pillar.

An hour passed on. The great bronze door had long been closed and the fugitive seemed left alone for the night; when suddenly the grating of a key was heard in the lock and three or four men in cloaks and with lanterns entered. At the first, Loys de Martelle believed that his enemies had become wearied with waiting for him outside, and had resolved to inflict their vengeance upon him in the stillness of the night and regardless of the privileges of the place; and he straightened up his figure for deadly conflict. Though of a surety he would be overcome in the end, yet would he sell his life as dearly as possible.

"Are you looking for me?" therefore he cried. "Then come, and take me if you can."

The men did not answer, inasmuch as they did not comprehend the purport of his speech. For the cathedral being so long and so deeply arched, words that might be spoken at one end reached the other merely in confused unmeaning murmur. Therefore the men now heard only an unintelligible sound; and supposing it to be a complaint for assistance from some pent up refugee, they scarcely turned their heads, but resolutely pressed onward

to their task. One, indeed, raised a lantern above his head in vain attempt to spy out the far off speaker; then without a word followed his companions.

Groping clumsily along, they traversed half the length of the nave and then turned into one of the transepts. Here beneath a low arch which spanned one corner, they stopped, set down their lanterns and threw off their coarse cloaks; disclosing, thereby, shovels and crowbars which had hitherto been concealed. With these, they proceeded to tear up a portion of the pavement, and throw out the hard packed earth beneath it.

Relieved, thereby, of his apprehension, Loys de Martelle now stealthily approached to watch the work; for the lights, dimly as they burned, somewhat enlivened that portion of the cathedral, and after the neglect and solitude of the past day he began to have feverish desire to listen to the sounds of the human voice, even though he might take no part in the conversation. Therefore he glided from pillar to pillar until he approached one from which he could easily watch the men at their task, and behind this he stood.

Meanwhile the men toiled steadily on without a word or giving utterance to any sound, excepting their quick deep involuntary breathing as they plied the crowbars and shovels. Soon the pavement for many feet around was torn up, then the earth lightly heaped thereupon, and in a few moments a pit of considerable depth was dug. As it became deeper, two of the men leaped into it, and still

threw out the earth until at last only their heads appeared above the level of the pavement. Then for a moment they paused to breathe and wipe the perspiration from their faces ; and one of them exclaimed :

" Surely he can now rest safe enough without being put away deeper, I should think."

" Yes," said the second. " And here is the coffin of another of the family, just where we placed it last. Listen ! "

With that he thrust his crowbar downward, and it gave forth a hollow sound,—the sound of striking upon half rotted wood. Then the men jumped out and prepared to go away ; and Loys de Martelle moved with curiosity, stepped from behind his pillar and confronted them.

" Whose grave is that you are digging, my men ? " he asked.

One of them lifted his lantern, and noting the knightly costume of the person before him, began to make respectful answer ; then another tapped the first upon the arm and whispered something into his ear. At this the face of the man changed with expression of ferocity, and his voice became harsh and guttural, and he placed his lantern close against one of the upturned pavement stones and said :

" Read for yourself, master. There ! "

With a thrill of horror, Loys de Martelle decyphered the word ' De Courtrai ! ' This, then, was the family tomb, and he had been watching the digging of his victim's grave.

"How like you it?" cried one of the men in a scornful tone. "Is it deep enough? You, in good truth, should know."

"If not, let him dig it deeper himself," said another. "By the mass! he should be made to dig it all, for it is he who has prepared the filling of it.—And who are you?" he added to a new person appearing suddenly upon the scene.

"Who am I?" was the rejoinder; and for other answer the new comer shook his tunic until the bells rang, and then plucking his cap from his bosom placed it upon his head, and danced his head this side and that, until his whole person rang out like a chime. "Know you not, then, the Fool of the Grand Duke of Mantua, now in holy sanctuary and thereby trying to save the head that has been sorely endangered by its ill-timed wit?"

Upon hearing this, the men crowded around, shook him by the hand and with close questioning asked narration of his adventures. Then, in a moment, while Loys de Martelle found himself so roughly repulsed by the brutal taunts of the gravediggers, the Court Fool was seated among them in pleasant familiar intercourse. They listened greedily to his jokes and stories. Some thought to plan escape for him, but this could not be done without risk to themselves; nor was it worth the while, inasmuch as before long the Jester could depend upon his master's pardon. But in default of his escape, the gravediggers endeavored to add to his comfort as much as lay

in their present power, by contributions; one giving him a flask of wine and another some dry bread; and at the end of an hour Sir Loys, looking from his corner, saw the Jester having much enjoyed the pleasure of social intercourse, rapturously taking leave of his newly gained friends.

CHAPTER XVII.

LITTLE need that Loys de Martelle should condescend to answer the jibes of base born churls with other than contemptuous silence; little other than sorrow and remorse for him to let his eyes wander towards the newly made grave of him whom he had slain. Therefore, the night being now well advanced, he repaired once more to his secluded nook among the clustered pillars, there again to seek forgetfulness of his troubles. And turning his mind as far as in him lay from further contemplation of all these miseries, he flung himself prostrate upon the cold pavement, rested his aching head upon his arm thrown up behind him, and awaited sleep. When he had there slumbered upon the previous night, sweet visions had appeared to soothe him. Then his body had needed rest from the harsh strain of conflict and pursuit; now both body and mind required repose. Surely, therefore, the pleasant dreams that then had visited him might again and with as ready grace, be sent down from Heaven for his consolation.

Alas, that the waking thoughts cannot always be car-

ried into the visions of the night, and that the desire for the soul's comfort so seldom finds in dreams its sweet sequence and fruition! All that night, Loys tossed from side to side with the torturings of distressful shadows. No more the gentle face of Manon came with it's soft gazing into his eyes; the time for such pleasant illusion seemed all past. Doubt and anxiety and the increasing pain of his hitherto little regarded wound began now to work their united wills upon him, and in place of seraphic fancies and dearly loved memories there came fast shifting visions of terror and alarm. At times he saw him whom he had so fatefully slain, lying stark and pale before him. Upon the heart of the young page was imposed the stone inscribed with the name De Courtrai; and the body, which in its manifestations of life seemed yet no corse, continually struggled to arise from beneath the burden, in order to attack the innocent slayer. At other times the sleeper dreamed that he was standing beneath the gallows tree; and as he took his last look of life he saw among the crowd below, the Jester surrounded by the gravediggers, all pointing up at him with uncouth gestures. And when at last he awoke and found the morning light streaming in upon him, he arose not in the fulness of the hope that had sustained him the previous morning, but rather in the despondency of sinking heart and failing strength.

Even then, however, after a moment or two of thoughtfulness, during which, leaning motionless against the

pillar, he bent his eyes upon the ground and strove to gain correct realization of his situation, there came some faint sparks of hope to give him temporary courage. Worn and haggard he now felt himself to be,—bereft of all that elasticity that had enabled him to look his fortune steadily in the face and enter into disputatious quarrel with the Priest; but who, after all, could tell what the day might not bring forth in his favor? Could one day be so much like another, indeed, that both should be equally weighted with misery? Might not his friends at last come forward, if not to rescue, at least to sustain and comfort him; until, with better knowledge of what had happened, the popular acclaim should turn in his favor? Of a truth, it was to be expected that his enemies among whom his mischance had happened, should be the first to know of it; but now that a whole day had elapsed, there were more chance that his friends should learn the truth and come forward in his behalf. There were those who had known him in the wars,—and some who had sought to be his esquires,—and not a few intimates of the Court and yeomanry whom he had befriended with his protection and purse; from out of all these diverse elements, surely there should be gathered the nucleus of a party in his favor. He would wish to live,—nay, it was incumbent upon him to baffle hate and live on for many years to come, now that he felt assured that Manon was not dead, and that she was still faithful to him.

They did not come, those so ardently expected friends. But as upon the previous day, his enemies did not cease to throng about him. The watchful men-at-arms, entering and silently contemplating him from a distance, to make sure that he had not escaped,—the children approaching with timid step and gazing upon him with wonderment, as though he were a captured wild beast,—the foes of high degree coming closer and tightening their grasp about their sword hilts in the fierce hate of their near survey of him,—none of these failed again to appear. And as before, Loys de Martelle stood at his post silently undergoing that baneful scrutiny, and with mustering of bravest resolution and undauntedness of mien endeavoring to answer all defiances.

So passed the morning. Gradually as the hours crowded by, each bringing a less hopeful view of his condition, he felt himself growing more worn and haggard, less able to endure with calmness this unfriendly scrutiny. Not alone that his mind grew more despairing and unquiet, but that his body, also, added its incentives to increasing misery. For now, hunger began to assail him. For nearly two days he had eaten or drank nothing; and this, though at first disregarded as a discomfort that had hitherto often befallen him, failed not at last to make itself felt. His wound, too, pained him more than before, the rudely placed bandage having become hopelessly disarranged. There were moments when he felt that he could have surrendered life with joy, for a draught of

water or a morsel of bread. And there were other times when the phases of his distress would change, and mere bodily pain or discomfort would leave him for a while, and in their place would come such weakness that it was difficult not to sink down in abject helplessness. Then again, with pain and weakness combined, there would be moments when he became almost insensible ; yet never without some dim consciousness of his situation attending him. He would stand against the pillar, with almost as erect and defiant mien as at the first, so cogently did the habit of his mind control him ; and through his brain, strange, weird images would pass, circling around him in confusing groups, impressing themselves upon him with such semblance of reality that for the instant he would seem to lose perception of their falsity ; yet all the while he would dimly see the groined arches spanning the roof above him and the grinning corbel heads gazing down upon him, and would plainly hear the echoing footfalls as one person after another entered or departed.

Noon and the smaller hours beyond slowly crept over the dial plate. Then, with sudden resolution of change, hoping perhaps that in variety of place there might be relief, Loys de Martelle left his pillar and passed out of the transept. Surely he had done enough for display of courage and fortitude, in having so long remained in that one place, to face the angry scowls and scrutiny of his enemies. Let him now wander away into some other

quarter of the building, where he could be alone. And were he in that seclusion to yield for a chance moment or two to the impulse of succumbing to his suffering rather than be compelled by the presence of others to assume a fortitude too rigorous for any one uninterruptedly to bear, it should not be to his discredit. Now for the instant the cathedral was empty ; there could be no one to note his departure. Therefore, in his craving for some solitude, he passed from the transept and slowly and in listless spirit wandered down the aisle. And doing this, it seemed as though in this new direction of his impulse, some long pent up fount of fancy was set free within him, since now again there came before him certain weird phantoms of imagination, confusing all his thoughts and purposes. Phantoms less dream-like, and therefore for the most part seemingly more real and tangible than any that had yet obtruded themselves before him, —singly and in pairs, and yet again in vast confusing throng, ever increasing in number as he slowly advanced, as if through the vanguard of the spirit-army he had come at last to its main body,—all these in that short passage along the aisle confronted him ; and though there were some which presented themselves with loving and encouraging aspect, others showed such threatening appearance that there were moments when he was almost ready to retreat. Why strive, indeed, against these powers of the air, thus seeking to bar his path ? But taking courage he pressed forward, and doing so, the

weird shapes parted and disappeared before him; and for the moment, the confusing films once more cleared away from his disordered brain. As before, the arched pillars stood out advanced in long unvarying line; cold, severe and motionless, with no shape incorporeal or real to interrupt him. And passing his hand across his eyes as though to brush away the last suggestions of errant fancy, he dragged himself slowly down the length of the aisle;—then coming to a small open doorway in the thickness of the further wall, listlessly entered and began to climb a winding stairway within.

The way grew more narrow as he advanced. Here and there the stairway seemed to terminate; but only that at the last apparent step it might bend and twist in a new direction. Great beams covered with the dust and cobwebs of centuries stretched across the path, or inclined overhead in close proximity. But still the captive continued on; until suddenly the stairway came to an end and he emerged into the light of day. Then he found himself upon the cathedral roof.

He stood just where not many days before, Cecile had stood beside Pere Rouflet. Like unto her, he now gazed down upon the little city; but from the gloomy coloring of his thoughts, with far different feelings than she had known. Free from care and buoyant with youth and health, and with her heart attuned to joy by the bright sunlight lovingly bathing her figure in golden radiance, Cecile had seen beauty and gentle sweetness in the whole

view spread out before her,—in the open square and the quaint old houses and the distant mountains and the river passing through the city like a silver thread, and more than all else, in her castle home with its environing green woodland. But Loys de Martelle saw only a rugged ill-built city, darkening rapidly with the long shadows cast by the swift-descending sun, tomblike streets and lanes the homes of filth and penury and disease, and an open square whose only purpose seemed to be for station of pillory and gallows ; and around all, the line of fortified wall with guarded gates, making of the whole scene a close darksome prison. To him the distant mountains were merely retreats which he might never reach, and the river a highway upon which he could not hope to escape.

As he thus gazed, his sight grew dizzy ; and for the moment he clung closely to the parapet, in fear lest he might slip down and be dashed to pieces. The next instant, however, some inward prompting seemed to make itself heard, whispering strange temptations to him. Why, after all that had passed, should he wish to live longer ? Had life any further sweets for his enjoyment ? Let him, therefore, hurl himself over. One moment of courageous resolution, and he would be at rest forever ; or, if he were to awake in another world, even hell had no torments to exceed those which now he bore. Nay,—for so, after an instant, the promptings seemed to change and rather than pointing towards destruction to whisper ghostly suggestions of supernatural relief,—why should he die at all ?

Why not, through power of his guardian genius, escape to laugh his pursuers to scorn? With that, a lurid smile flickered over his face, and he placed his foot lightly upon the parapet. It might be that with returning reason he would have removed his foot again; it might be that his disordering impulse, on the contrary, might have impelled him to complete the meditated destruction. But at that moment, a friendly grasp upon the arm restrained him and a familiar voice sounded in his ear.

"Not so fast indeed, comrade," said the Court Jester. "If it is escape you are planning, I know not that I would be the one to hinder you, and doubtless you might find means to clamber down on point and projection outside. But once at the bottom, what benefit would the adventuring have done you?" And the Jester pointed below, where three or four men at arms were alertly watching even the sides and rear of the cathedral. "While if it were, as I half suspect, to put an end to yourself—"

"What then, you would say?"

"Why then, comrade, it must seem to any one an unbecoming way for a brave knight to die,—dashed to pieces like a dog instead of falling with trusty sword in hand."

Sir Loys passed his hand thrice before his face, meditatively, as though sweeping away some disordering fantasies.

"You are right," then he said. "Yet do you know that which I thought of, only a moment ago? It was not

upon escape that I was bent, nor yet destruction ; seeing that there seemed spirits in the air which beckoned me to throw myself over and they would support me lovingly in their arms in mid-air, and so fly off with me to place of safety."

"That thing which you thought,—surely you can not have believed it, comrade?"

"For the moment indeed ; yet for not longer than a moment. Believing, yet not believing. For know, that within the last hour my brain has teemed as never yet brain has been possessed, perhaps, with ghostly figures and fanciful apparitions ; and though I have sought to reason calmly with myself, and have given no faith to their assumed reality, yet have they affrighted me all the same, and, if driven away, still thronged around me in full force and power as before."

"That is strange, indeed," said the Jester.

"Yet for all that, none the less true," responded Loys, now finding nothing of offence in the familiar address of the other, but feeling himself thereby constrained to confidence rather than repulsion ; so pleasant had at last become the sound of a friendly human voice, after those many long hours during which he had listened to no words other than of scorn and anger. "If you could know, indeed, about the shapes that met me in the aisle below and not many minutes ago—shapes to provoke terror, and shapes to summon confidence,—shapes to be dreaded and shapes against which to wage fierce battle,—gentle

spirits which lovingly and with seraphic smile seemed to beckon me towards them ; and hateful apparitions which, with angry frown and gesture threatened violence at my approach—shapes which stood apart from all others, silent, cold and motionless as the stone pillars around them ; and other shapes which circled hither and thither in disordered whirl, gliding not only past, but through each others unsubstantial outlines, the form of one resolving itself into other's forms and again separating each into its own,—beings of the air so thin and unsubstantial even to fancy's eye, that, gazing through their flimsy figures I could mark whatever of reality stood beyond, as through a faint vapor, and so looking, could almost laugh to myself as at a vain attempt to confuse and terrify me ; and yet again, other beings so lifelike in appearance that for the moment I stood uncertain and aghast, wondering whether these few might not be endowed with actual bodies against whose onset I must put myself upon defence—"

"Why, this is more than strange," interrupted the Jester. "And among all these appearances so terrifying, was there none coming with any comfort for you ? Were they all unfriendly ? "

"One there was, in the shape of a living person whom I have well thought of, in the past and whom—Look, when next you chance to descend, at the great picture over the high altar, if you would know what was her semblance. Though in different costume, now ; seeing

that, for more ready avoidance of any other's notice, she wears a close gray cloak and hood—"

"And whom, comrade, you met below? And whether in or out of the body, you cannot tell?"

"Out of the body, to a surety. And yet, so like to her, that it seemed as though I could have touched her and found her similitude a living, breathing form."

"And might it not really have been herself, comrade? For, as you know, the church is free for any one to come and go; and she as well as any other—"

"Nay, but behind her there came another of the same shape and nature seemingly, and enveloped like her in a gray hood and cloak,—and behind that, still a third one,—and so a score or two of exactly the same appearance, all walking in long straight file and with heads bent downward. Of a certainty, there could not be so many Manons."

"Of a certainty, indeed, it were more luck than ever happens to one man, that twenty beauteous damsels should come to him," remarked the Jester. "And then?"

"For the instant I stood affrighted, and would fain have returned upon my steps: then took courage and pressed onward as before, and so the mocking shapes all fled and vanished from before me."

"And how—"

"Strange and weird-like, even in their departure. Some retreated to one side and disappeared, I know not how.

Some not moving, yet fading away from before me, just as they stood. Others seeming to resolve themselves into the colored rays that with actual defined shape stole in through the windows. One dark shape there was, that beat and fluttered bat-like against the stained panes; and after a moment, came out at the further side as though it had melted through the glass. Other brighter spirits circled once or twice in riotous dance before me; and then with sudden whirl, swept out at an open window like torrent of dry leaves. So like the eddying of leaves was it, indeed, that for the instant I strove to follow their outer flight and resolve for myself their actual nature. But already they had disappeared from view, seeming to melt away into the clear air beyond."

"Well, be their vanishing as it might, comrade, you did right to resist them. It is the true method to fight against such fancies; seeing that then they will always scatter and disappear.—But tell me now," and he gazed inquiringly at the wan, troubled and fever-enkindled face of the other. "Such strange and ghostly shapes do not always beset us for nothing, and my mind misgives me that I know full well the cause of it. When last have you eaten or drunk?"

For a moment the Knight was obliged to pause and reflect, so disordered was the current of his memory.

It was two days ago, or thereabout," he then said. "Of a certainty, not since I have been pent up here.'

With that the Jester smote himself roughly upon the

knee in token of strong emotion suddenly evoked, and burst forth into a loud oath; and again he took the Knight by the arm,—this time with purpose to lead him away.

"Come now with me, good comrade," he exclaimed. "Whatever of wrong you may or may not have done within these past few days, it is worse than falling from a church's roof upon the stones below, and doubly worse than avenging thrust of thirsty sword, that a brave knight should here be starved to death like a rat built into a wall. And whatever of evil the Courtrai clan may purpose against you, it is not for me, though the Duke's retainer,—being for all that merely a simple Fool and wearing not arms,—to help them forward in the matter. Come, therefore with me, and let me lead you to such relief as I can here afford."

CHAPTER XVIII.

GENTLY guiding the Knight, he led him slowly and carefully down the steps again, steadying his feet wherever the way was dark and winding, until they had advanced half way back to the interior of the church. At this point there was a small side opening in the wall of the stairway ; passing through which, they stood within the belfry. There hung the nine bells of varying size, comprising the Cathedral chime. Along the walls of the belfry ran a plain board seat, and in one corner of this stood a black loaf and a bottle of sour wine. These were the spoils that the Jester had gathered from the grave diggers the night before ; and having as yet the satisfaction of a properly filled stomach, he had carefully laid them one side in this concealment, for future use.

"Take this,—and also this," he now said, extending the black loaf towards the Knight, and preparing to pour out for him a cupful of the sour wine.

The eyes of Loys de Martelle for a moment sparkled joyously at the sight of such offered treasure ; never before had food seemed so welcome to him. Then, as he

essayed to partake of it, the light of anticipation almost instantly faded away into apathetic dulness. For as it happened, the appetite with which he might have solaced himself a few hours before had left him, and he could now do no more than crumble a morsel and take a single sip. That done, he lowered his hand and let the rest fall from him.

"Is it not good?" said the Jester, somewhat disappointed. "Nay, I know that it is not knightly food, and that you have been used to better, as of course. Yet assuredly it is the best I have. Could I present to you other and more palatable food, I would gladly do so. As it is, I thought it might be, that, in your circumstance of sore hunger and thirst——"

"It is not that,—indeed it is not that," the Knight responded. "Believe me not so ungrateful. Better food has not always been my portion. Often has it happened that while in camp I have shared with my vassals far poorer fare and with abundant relish. But now,—alas! I cannot,—much as I really would. Truly, my body has become a prey to strange inconsistencies. And as for my mind—See!" he continued, pointing in front of him. "They come again—those strange shapes! Am I never to be free from the terror of them? Look you now!"

"Is it the little one in the gray hood and cloak again, comrade?"

"Not so,—but other shapes. They are all unreal and unsubstantial,—so much I do surely know, and that it is

my own mind which is at fault; and yet they affright me more than if they were actual flesh and blood. Being the latter, I might contend with them; perchance might vanquish them so that they would never return. But these—I see the figures of armed knights with their swords already drawn, and they all point and glance at me! And there are priests in altar vestments,—priests like the one whom yesterday I crushed down upon his knees; but who, with more assured courage than he displayed, now point menacingly at me, as though they were charged with all the thunders of the Church! These all wind in and out among the bells and press towards me, and frighten me none the less that I know they are not real."

"Why then, Comrade, let us do as you did before,—advance boldly upon them and thereby put them to ignominious flight. Trust me,—be it ghost or demon or mere fancy of the brain,—whatever shapely torment it may be,—if he plays the coward once in front of open attack he will surely do the same thing again. Come,—go with me. Together we should be enough to win a victory over them."

Carefully taking the black bread and the cup of sour wine out of the Knight's lowered hand,—for of the two, the Jester had the wit to be prudent, not knowing how soon the food that could not now be used might become more palatable,—he grasped the Knight by the arm and urged him on, himself walking at his side. Doing so, he

drew forth his own sword of silvered lath, and waved it in front as though making bold attack with weapon of real offence; amusing himself with passes of carte and tierce at the foe, which only the other could see. Thus with locked arms the two men slowly circled the bells and returned to their first position.

"Have they gone?" the Jester asked. "Has merely a gleam of my redoubtable weapon put them to hurried flight? In my wrathful passes at them, have I chanced to strike any one of them and let out his ghostly blood?"

"They have gone," answered the Knight. "Nor did they wait to be smitten,—if smitten, indeed, they can be; but retired before us at more than arm's length. Strange, too, how they departed. Not vanishing or passing out at the door through which we entered, but rising in eddying mass, even as the dust is lifted from the ground; and so, in long extended train, flying up into the mouth of the largest bell."

"So let it be," responded the Jester encouragingly. "There let them remain until at the next Angelus the great bell swings round too suddenly for their escape and pounds them to atoms. Perchance among them may be the Great Enemy himself, thus destined to be caught and extinguished forever in the toils of the Holy Church," he continued in vein of grim humor. "If so, should not I be canonized, who with my wooden sword have driven him thither and relieved the world of his temptings?"

"Nay, but what if he return from thence to trouble us

before the next Angelus ?" said the Knight, too disordered of thought to notice that the Jester had spoken in anything but serious speculation. "What if they all return ? Already I seem to see one of them,—not Satan himself nor yet one of the priests, but one of the armed knights, —black bearded and in full panoply of mail, and with a white plume in his helmet. He is looking out at me, watchfully, from beneath the rim of the bell,—with more apparent wrathfulness and fierceness of expression than ever man could have had before, as now I see him scowling at me with face reversed. Nay,—no longer does he seem to regard the flourishing of your weapon, for still he holds his place, nor mitigates at all the rigor of his gaze. See ! now he puts forth first an arm and then a leg and begins to descend. He is coming again to invite attack, and the others will surely follow."

"Say you so ?" returned the Jester, rising from his seat with the conviction that it was hopeless to allay his companion's disorder by any effort of reason, and that the only proper resort lay in retirement from the scene. "Is it true that my trusty weapon, after so many years of usefulness has become at last of none effect ? Then let us leave these disturbing fiends to each others company. So can they come out or go in again undisturbed, and each at its own pleasure ; and perchance, for lack of ourselves to torment, they may quarrel among themselves, so as in the end to sulk apart in separate bells. Let us away."

Tenderly he led the Knight out,—gently and with considerate oversight as he had brought him in; and so they slowly descended the remainder of the stone steps and stood again upon the floor of the nave. Already,—so long had they lingered upon the roof and in the belfry,—the afternoon was declining into dusk, and the early shadows began to gather in the narrowest nooks of the arches and to deepen into utter blackness around the heavy mouldings. It was about the hour when commonly few persons were to be found within the whole compass of the Cathedral; and so, but for especial occasion, would it now have been. But all at once the great bronze doors were thrown open to their full extent; and there came a crowd of men and women hurrying through in disorderly array, defying any attempts of the vergers to check their impetuous efforts towards securing favorable positions within the church. Then, far louder than the noise and exclamations of that struggling throng, was heard the solemn chanting of many priests and choristers. Now it rose high upon the air in prolonged strains,—now it sank into a low subdued melody,—a hushed tone of wailing. Nearer and nearer it came; and then was heard, far different from the hurried tramp of those who had already entered, the measured shuffle of a slow moving procession. As the sounds increased with their nearer approach, Loys de Matelle lifted his eyes, confusedly parted his tangled hair from his haggard brow and sought to listen. There was the flicker of a smile upon his face, as though

the soft strains pleased him ; and again he slightly frowned and muttered incoherently to himself in attempt to collect his thoughts. And suddenly starting into animation, he pointed wildly forward.

"Look!" he cried, "they come once more,— those priests and warriors whom we have already put to flight! How issued they from the belfry again and from this quarter to disturb us? And see!—in the front of all is the black bearded knight with the white plume! Let us go forward and once more put them to rout. It is the only way,—have you not already said the same?"

"For ghostly apparitions,—yes; but not for these," hurriedly responded the Jester, seizing the other vigorously by the arm and restraining him from the purposed forward action. "Not for these, indeed! Do you not see that these are real,—that the white plumed Knight is the castellan De Courtrai? On your life, remain and follow me!"

In dire distress for his companion's safety, the Jester by main force turned him about, and still grasping him by the arms, dragged him towards the other end of the cathedral. So far, they had chanced to remain unheard and unrecognized. The crowd that had already entered were too busily engaged in finding places for themselves to regard each other, and would not readily take note of other groups hurrying beside them in the same direction. Coming to the further end, the Jester gazed around in search of some haven of refuge for the Knight. There

seemed but one place where he could hide him completely from all view. It was a confessional which stood at the angle of a transept. At the moment, the Jester did not perceive that it stood exactly in front of the newly opened grave ; there was no time for such close observation of the place as that. With one hand he thrust the yielding Knight into the confessional, with the other drew the light curtain close across ; then with parting injunction that he should not speak or move, stood at one side and left the rest to fate.

And now, as the swelling chant at last arose within the walls and the muffled grating of the footsteps of the slow moving procession was heard upon the marble pavement, the incoherent phantasies that had beset the mind of Loys de Martelle partially passed away, his perception of time and place returned, and he began to realize that those knights and priests were real and that the funeral rites of his victim were to be performed before him. In misery and despair he stood within the confessional ; and peeping through the curtain hurriedly surveyed his situation. Could he now take flight? Alas ! it was too late for that. Already a crowd had gathered about the grave in front of him, shutting out all retreat. There was nothing to be done, indeed, but to shrink into the furtherest corner of his chance refuge, and in that silence and obscurity, await the end. But, as though he were destined always to be the prey and sport of circumstance, now that he could not escape he found it impossible not

to survey the whole scene; and when he would have looked away, some inward fiend, delighting to play upon the remaining phantasies of his disordered brain, ever forced him to peep forth at the side of the little curtain and witness the funeral pageant.

There were choristers in long white scarfs. There were acolytes bearing candles which at first feebly flickering, momentarily gained new brightness in comparison with the fast fading light of day. There were priests in their richest vestments and bearing crosses and incense. There were bearers selected from noble families, carrying the open bier. There were relatives of the House of De Courtrai bowed down with grief. There were richly dressed retainers of the Grand Duke of Mantua, manifesting sympathy with their presence. There were serviteurs and attendants flaunting in mourning badges. There were assistants carrying the arms and armorial bearings of the deceased. All these Loys de Martelle now saw, as the procession slowly advanced up the nave and at last gathered in compact mass in front of him. Again and again he attempted to withdraw his eyes from the curtain chink and retire into the partial obscurity of the rear of the confessional; and again and again the tormenting fiend within commanded him to remain and witness to the very end the rites of sepulchre.

Now the death chant sending its last mournful notes through the arches of the cathedral sank into silence. The bearers deposited the bier at the edge of the grave,—

the priests gathered closely around,—the relatives of the House stood near, gazing upon the face of the dead,—the spectators driven back by the vergers sought places upon projecting cornices or clung around the bases of the great pillars in their attempt to gain full view of all that might transpire; and amid the ringing of bells and the wafting of sweet incense the priests began the service.

And all the while, actuated by the same strange fascination, Loys de Martelle remained with his eye closely fastened to the curtain chink. To be obliged to do this and gaze down upon the face of that much loved friend slain by himself was agony enough, and yet there was more to come. The inward fiend continued to the last to play his unruly tricks with the Knight's disordered imagination; and, as the rites progressed, a morbid ungovernable fancy seized upon the watcher's soul. It was in fact, a desire to look closer upon the dead and note for himself how he appeared. So pure and sweet as Arnulf seemed at that little distance, so life-like upon his bier that but for the attendant circumstances one might have supposed he was asleep upon his couch,—nearer by, would he not appear yet more pure and sweet, and perchance with some angelic spirit of the forgiveness in which he had died still impressed upon his face for the constant consolation of the innocent slayer? More than all that: might it not be that to look more closely upon the dead would redound to the slayer's good? Thinking upon these possibilities, Loys de Martelle recalled a super-

stition of the day, yet to the day itself no mere superstition but a conceded fact. It was said that at the approach of a murderer, the murdered man's wounds would bleed afresh; but how about the reverse of this? What if the alleged murderer were guiltless in intent; would not the victim of a mere mistake endeavor, by some supernatural manifestation, to absolve and acquit him? At his approach to say farewell, might not the dead face of Arnulf relax from its rigidity and smile upon him,—perchance the arms be raised towards him in loving amity? And seeing this, might not the bystanders appreciate the motive of the incident and add the seal of their forgiveness? In vain, with feeble remnant of better judgment, Loys de Martelle strove for a while to resist the urgings of this fancy,—in vain he closed his eyes and knit his fingers in his hair in effort to banish the insane idea. The chuckling fiend within would have its way; and at last, in obedience to that prompting, Loys emerged from the confessional like some unquiet ghost and slowly tottered towards the body.

He falteringly advanced for a moment unmolested. The mourners and all those who took part in the ceremonial were either turned with their backs in that direction or held their eyes fixed upon the bier and did not at once recognize the intruder. The few who did observe him were of the mere chance attendants, of whom some knew him not and others parted in silence before him, shunning his touch as though he bore contagion. Thus

unmolested, Loys advanced towards the bier ; and just as the castellan De Courtrai bent over the body to take his last look, the slayer, still moved by the same irresistible impulse, leaned over the castellan's shoulder.

For a moment only. Ere he had time to scan a single feature of the pale corse, he was discovered. A shriek of woman rang wildly through the transept. There were loud oaths of men. There was a sudden impetuous drawing of swords and daggers. A moment more, and the intruder would have been slain where he chanced to stand, without regard to the rights of sanctuary. The castellan De Courtrai already had his sword gleaming in the air, when one of the priests threw himself hurriedly between.

"Forbear ! In the Church's name !" cried the Priest.

"I will have vengeance !" was the hoarse reply ; and a murmur of approbation arose from all around. But the Priest was inflexible. He still stood in the way ; and before the avenger could act his purposed will, some few of those who were anxious to prevent the threatened profanation interfered. With no gentle hand they hurled the intruder away, and hurried him quickly to the outskirts of the assembled crowd. There, with muttered caution that he should not again offend, they left him to himself.

CHAPTER XIX.

THERE was no longer any chance, indeed, that Loys de Martelle would again intrude his presence upon the funeral rites. Now that he was left apart from all fellow men, the attendant fiend that had so cruelly urged him to rash action also departed, abandoning him thenceforth to his own devices. Why linger longer to torment the victim, who, obeying so readily those behests of inward prompting, had so fully accomplished the demoniac purpose? Therefore Loys, with body still more enfeebled yet with mind restored to something of its natural collectedness of thought, no longer made effort to mingle among other men, but quietly and with something of the instinct of a hunted animal, wandered off again to his secluded corner by the clustered pillars.

Soon,—very soon, indeed,—all was quiet once more. The priests had stilled the tumult, the burial been completed and the mourners dispersed. Of that great crowd of spectators, the largest portion had followed the procession as it took up its homeward route, while others returned to their interrupted occupations. A few,—these

mostly from among the women,—remained for a while longer, taking this opportunity to offer up their vesper prayers; but hurrying withal, and not tarrying longer than could be helped, lest they should be overtaken by the fast gathering darkness. Some few others there were of the spectators who lingered behind and strolled in desultory manner around the cathedral, moved with curious intent to gain further observation of the hunted man; but not at the instant detecting him in his seclusion, they soon gave up the search and followed the footsteps of those who had already departed. Then came the men who the night before had dug the grave; and they, now rapidly putting back the earth, replaced the pavement stones over all. In a few moments these men also went away; and at last Loys de Martelle seemed left again alone.

In quietness he remained for a while longer, utterly wearied now of life, and at last made hopeless of escape. If there had ever been any friends of his in all the wide world,—and at times he had believed that there were many such,—they had all proved unfaithful, inasmuch as in this dire extremity they had not ventured to come forward in his behalf. Even at the best, it was more than likely that their most strenuous efforts would prove of little avail against the more powerful influences arrayed for his destruction. Too mighty to be at present withstood were the interested slanders against his fair fame; and the very attempt he had so lately made to clear him-

self of obloquy and perchance to gain from his enemies some small meed of tenderness and compassion, had recoiled with force upon himself. True indeed, that at his approach the fair face of the dead Page had not flushed with hate, nor the stilled blood oozed forth as at the presence of hitherto undetected murderer, and in so far the olden superstition had not answered its expected test. Yet, on the other hand, neither had the cold lips parted for him, the unwitting slayer, into loving and forgiving smile, nor had the eyes unclosed with affection's welcome. All had remained lifeless, unaltered and in repose; except that the angry passions of a gathered horde had surged wildly in tempestuous tide and in terrible malediction at an approach which, though intended half in broken hearted supplication, had been interpreted as insulting aggravation of bitter wrong. All hope of rescue or release was now lost, indeed; and oppressed with that terrible realization, the captive at last arose and in distracted want of purpose, began to pace the pavement. Once in the circuit of the cathedral aisles, he approached the transept and chanced to stand again near where the slain Page lay buried. The earth had all been shovelled back, the pavement stones been carefully replaced and the surface swept. From any matter of external sign, none could know that sepulchral rites had so recently been there enacted. Had it in fact been so,—or was it all a dream? Passing his hands across his brow and inwardly struggling for calm reflection, Loys felt at last a return of recollection; and now, hurrying

away from that ill omened place, he wandered off to where the choir floor began to rise above the nave, and there sank upon the lower step.

And now, as one reviews an account that is nearly finished and must soon be closed and laid away forever, he sat and thought upon his past life, which as at some inward dictation, rolled itself out before him like a painted screen. It had been, in the main, a pleasant and honorable life. Excepting for the troubles of the last few days, there had never been suspicion of stain upon it; and even at this last, it might be that when he was in his grave, the burst of popular fury would become subdued, and with better and more kindly thought of him, the tide of misconstruction would be left to ebb, and so his fair fame thereafter bear no adverse record other than of fate-compelling misfortune. He had been a prisoner once, but that was the mere fortune of war; in return for which, fate had thrice delivered brave knights into his hands, and they had been obliged to purchase their freedom with heavy ransom, while for these evidences of his valor, more than once the King had spoken commendingly about him. Tracing his life still further back upon the unrolling screen, he saw once more the fair picture of his happy career as royal Page,—basking throughout his youth in kingly favor, and in what then he most valued, beauty's smiles. There was no blot or blemish even upon that portion of his recollections. Still further back again, to where

he was so young in years that valor's field or beauty's captivations could not well seek him out,—so far back, indeed, that it seemed as though there could be no especial memories evoked relating to a life as yet so uneventful and purposeless. But yet, as fate or chance would will it, now singularly enough there came one recollection wonderfully distinct amid so many surroundings that were obscure. It related to the burial rites of some old gray bearded warrior of the Martelle family; wherein Loys, falling behind unnoticed after all others of his line had departed, had wandered heedlessly around the church, and finally had seated himself just where he now sat, and musingly watched the gathering of the evening shadows. In the completeness of that recollection, he remembered how he had gazed upon one round spot of bright moonlight that stole in through a transept window and fell upon the pavement at his feet, and how he had watched its slow passage along the smooth marble, and had wondered why that portion only should be so favored with brightness when all else was steeped in gloom. And lo! even now there was the same bright circle of silver moonlight stealing softly along before him. The world meanwhile had had its wars and tumults and its diversities of custom and fashion; but the moon had remained unchanged and the cathedral to all appearance was no older, and here again the heavenly light and the pierced stone work combined to spread out the same simple mysteries at his feet. Indeed, he might altogether

have now forgotten all lapse of years and felt himself once more a boy, while watching the sliding by of the slow moving moonlight ; but for the dull sense of inward misery not to be driven off by any temporary distraction of the mind, and for the sharper but for all that, the more easily endured anguish of his open wound.

For now again the wound began to trouble him, inflicting racking pain. Once more the bandage had become disarranged, and thereby having dragged the flesh apart, the open sword-cut clotted with blood began to fester. He could not now in the fast failing light, close again the wound or bind the covering around it with even ordinary skill ; for as speedily as one fold was properly disposed, another slipped aside. Impatiently at last he flung the silken sash away ; but as the cold currents of air circled around and touched the lacerated flesh, each moment the intensity of the sharp shooting pain increased and he was compelled once more to lift the bandage and renew his baffling task. And while so doing, suddenly a gentle voice close at his right hand addressed him.

"Loys de Martelle," the soft voice said, "let me do that poor service for you."

Raising his eyes, he beheld beside him a woman's figure,—a slight built, fragile form in gray hood and cloak,—bending in sympathy towards him. So much in the gathering darkness he could readily distinguish, and it was enough to make his despairing heart bound as with

the impulse of a sudden great joy. Or might not this be a new delusion of his senses,—another mere unsubstantial apparition, indeed,—the latest cruel aggravation of the mocking fiend within him? But as in this terrible uncertainty of mind he gazed doubtingly, another slender ray of the silver moonlight, stealing through the chancel window with feeble gleam shone askant upon her; and as Loys now looked inquiringly into the dark liquid eyes and dwelt upon the parted lips and recalled even in the few words she had spoken the old familiar tones of that dearly treasured voice, he faintly whispered:

"Is it you at last, Manon?"

"It is Manon herself," a third voice exclaimed; and glancing up towards whence the words proceeded, he beheld Pere Rouflet standing behind upon the step above and looking down upon them both. "It is indeed Manon, Sir Knight. I have myself brought her to this place; to the intent, in part, that by one kind act I may hope to gain her forgiveness and your own."

"It is well," Loys answered. And for a moment this was all that he could think to say. How, indeed, could he bring himself to pour forth even cold forgiveness for the mistaken conduct that had brought him into his present cruel strait or to lavish grateful thanks upon Pere Rouflet for a charity so tardily bestowed?

"What I have hitherto done, Sir Knight," Pere Rouflet continued, lingering a moment before he spoke, as if to give time for the other to utter even some semblance of

the hoped for words of pardon, "what I have done was not through despiteful malice or in cruel hindrance of your heart's longing. It was in mistaken zeal, perhaps; yet performed in all the purity of good intent. I could not willingly permit that Manon should be turned aside by needless revival of her buried love for you, from her fairer and more righteous destiny of peace and penitence awaiting her; or that you yourself should be sundered from those ties of state and habitude that most properly appertain to you."

"It must be well,—since you deem it so," the Knight responded, more coldly than before.

"Therefore have I brought her hither with me," Pere Rouflet said, "though all the while with sore misgiving and torturing doubt of the needfulness of the act, and surely with no intent that you should use the few moments you may now pass together, in idle words of love or dalliance, or for any purpose other than farewell before you separate upon your several ways forever. Do you not understand that it must be so?"

"What other intent than that can I now venture to admit?" Loys mournfully replied; for, as he gazed upon Manon's half shrouded face, it seemed as if something had removed her as far apart from him as though she had visited him from another world, and that now there could be no other sentiment in her behalf than one of heartfelt reverence and reserve. Not alone by reason of the influence of that quiet meek costume, so closely akin

to that which so soon she purposed to assume, but because in her whole impress there was that which somehow spoke of a deep and ever widening gulf between them. The dark lustre of the eyes and the gentle, sweet smile were still there; but now they seemed to glow for him no longer. There was nothing unkind or forbidding in her expression; yet upon every feature an ineffable repose appeared to rest, speaking abandonment of the past and of all its joys, and betokening a present calm that no longer took note of earthly affections, but looked forward only to the peace of Heaven. Was this repose the consequence of studied constraint? Or had it, through long exercise, become a portion of her very being? He could not tell,—he would no longer even give himself the right to ask. Sufficient for him to feel that whether by chance or effort, she was now removed far from all tenderness for him and devoted to more lasting duty.

"Let me do that poor service for you," she said, placing her hand gently upon his wounded arm. "Surely there can be no harm in ministering even to yourself, Sir Loys, in matter which so intimately concerns the bodily relief from pain."

Not answering otherwise than with grateful and acquiescent gaze,—for now it seemed as though he were speechless, nor indeed could even hope to frame into any connected utterance the troubled thoughts that so abundantly bewildered him,—Loys de Martelle inclined his wounded

arm towards her ; and, for a moment, he silently watched the gentle motion of her hand, as, with practiced touch, she endeavored properly to replace the tangled scarf, laying each fold carefully upon the other with ready skill, and touching him all the while so lightly that not another twinge of pain now came to agonize him. So for a moment she wrought, and with apparent success. Yet towards the end and with the proper result all but assured, whether it was that by reason of some inward agitation her accustomed skill forsook her or that the substance with which she dealt was in the nature of its texture too unruly and ill adapted to its present purpose, the folds already disposed relaxed their hold ; and one by one unwinding, left the long silken sash to fall again in disorder upon the pavement at her feet.

For a moment, Manon remained in motionless perplexity. Then recognizing the need of some different and more pliable material, she bent back her gray hood, letting it fall behind, and with ready motion unfastened the soft white band that bound her forehead. Folding this anew to suit the different purpose for which she destined it, she passed it lightly and smoothly around Loys' arm, successfully fitting fold over fold, so that every line and thread at last lay properly in place. This done, she drew her hand away from the completed task and silently rested.

And now Loys, who until that moment had scarcely paid attention to other than the skillful motion of her

nimble fingers, looked up into her face to thank her. At the first glance he was startled into sudden wonderment at the strange transformation that met his sight. Within the past few moments, the little circle of bright moonlight that at the first had lain across the marble pavement, little by little had crept up over the folds of her gray dress ; and so mounting, now spread its radiance upon her countenance, bringing out into plain relief each line of feature and shade of sweet expression, with such perfect distinctness as the faint thin ray that had before gleamed lightly upon her could never have given,—resting upon her in bounteous effulgence like a celestial nimbus. A minute before, even that bright glow might not have aided greatly in better revelation of her ; but now it happened that her own unpremeditated action had completed an unlooked-for transformation. For the gray disguising hood being now thrown back in collapsed folds, allowed the full shape of the head once more to be exposed, while the removal of the white band left her dark locks to float again in temporary freedom. Whatever their destiny in the convent, as yet they had not been severed, but had been merely bound closely out of sight. Upon the removal of their covering, they fell once more in full rich tresses about her forehead and cheeks. With their reappearance, the quaint quiescent repose and restraint of her new life seemed to have passed away,—the bright eye to have become brighter and instinct with some remaining expression of lingering affinity with the world,

—the lips to whisper some still existing power to love,—the former Manon, indeed, to have returned and to beam upon Loys with something of her past impulsive readiness to acknowledge ties of earthly affection. Could it indeed be true that now divested of those sober disguisings of apparel she was still at heart the same, and that in believing her to be changed he had done injustice to her? Or had she really given up her heart to newer and more chastened influences; and now, by reason of this chance re-assumption of long disused attractions had become restored to her other self only in his imaginings? He could not tell. So often of late had his breast been the prey of contradictory emotions through the influence of mere outward appliances disguising the true disposition for right or wrong, that now he dared not even deliberate upon the possibilities of her present nature. He could only gaze wonderingly upon her, and for the instant, held his peace.

Yet not for long. The few fleeting moments that might be left to them were very precious, and should not be wasted in idle revery or speculation. Pleasant indeed in any other place or circumstances to sit beside her as in the buried past and trifle wantonly with the thick clusters of dark wavy hair that flooded her cheeks; and sportively to struggle for furtive glances into her bright eyes, now no longer gleaming with responsive love but bowed in seeming abstracted contemplation of her small thin hands crossed idly upon her lap outside the gray cloak. But he

knew that she had been brought thither simply that they might say farewell before she entered upon her destined vocation, and he upon whatever path the mystery of fate might allot to him. Whether, therefore, she might still re tain in her changed life any poor relic of the olden power or disposition for earthly love, could matter little to him any longer. It must now be an occasion only for sad final parting,—whether in words of ardent love or of simple friendship, the cruel parting must take place all the same.

"I have so wronged you, Manon," therefore he began, breaking at last the silence, "in that I believed you could have been wilfully false to me! It might be that when you left me you loved me no longer,—such things will ever and anon happen in hearts that struggle most earnestly to remain true. But surely now I know it was not for love of any other, that you parted from me."

"And I, Loys," she responded, for the first time using the old familiar name and in the accustomed tone; "I have perhaps still more cruelly and deeply wronged you, in that I abandoned you with such sudden impulse and without due explanation. I think that it must have been, —indeed I do not know how else it could have been,— because I dared not see you even once again or for one fleeting moment, lest I might be shaken from my resolve. You know now, Loys, why it was needful that it should happen; do you not? I feared so greatly for my soul's welfare,—that was the one controlling thought that held me. And then again,—then I feared, perhaps with

almost as great a trouble, for the peace of her unto whom you were betrothed; and I felt that I should not hesitate to sacrifice myself for that purposed happiness of you both."

"And yet, Manon, it might well have been that you should have given me the right to choose between you," he responded bitterly. "Exercising such a right, might I not have preferred at the last to remain rather with you, whom I so deeply loved, than with one whose most ardently professed affection, when put to the trial, scarcely bore equal fruit of charity with mere common friendship?"

"Nay, Loys, that choice never indeed could have been so made. Your rank, your knightly station,—all must surely have prevented such self-sacrifice as that, whatever your secret thought. And then, too, why should I not believe that being betrothed to her, you must love her well and even better than you loved me? And what, therefore, could my jealous heart do otherwise than urge me to flee from my inevitable fate and struggle for forgetfulness which alone could bring me peace? And then, once more,—and it all had its influence upon my fixed resolve,—I thought that she must dearly love you in return, and that it must not be for me to bring misery upon her."

"You thought, you tell me? And did she not really love me, Manon, even at that first?"

As he spoke, there came a wild ungovernable hope in his heart,—a hope that Manon might have known some

circumstance of the past, in proof of the falsity of Cecile's professed affection, which circumstance now disclosed to him might justify him in his late desertion and indifference. Even now, could he learn this, it would be something towards the needed repose of his conscience.

"Ah, Loys, so indeed I thought; not knowing her at all, but not understanding how, with your glance of approbation upon her, she could help loving you. So do I no longer think; and yet it is not from knowing her any better than before. Seeing her, indeed, only twice or thrice, and then with fugitive opportunity; and yet—"

"And yet, Manon?"

"Alas! I know not how it was; but though I saw exceeding beauty in her face, there seemed not in her blue eyes to lurk such depth of passion as I should have supposed most worthy to bestow upon yourself. And when this morning, I learned that too readily she had allowed resentment at some hasty speech of yours—"

"Nay, Manon, let me therein at least approve her wrath, seeing that I was myself too greatly in fault against her to be forgiven easily."

"What then, Loys? For one hasty, inconsiderate speech must true love be slain outright? Have you not in past times been careless of word, even to myself? And did I ever, for that, send you from my presence? Ah, Loys, loved knight of mine, as truly you were! How much more bitter neglect than you could ever have given to her would I have borne uncomplainingly from you,

and yet have constantly returned again, with hope of new caresses to blot out the memory of such chance unkindness! Nay, think not that Cecile ever loved you with half the affection of my heart."

In sudden bewilderment of thought, Loys sat beside her and gazed upon the animating play of her expression, now again, though she was not aware of it, so eloquent with avowal of returning love, and listened to the story of her doubt of the fair Cecile. Strange that while he, with some slight remaining sense of past duty should feel compelled to urge defence of his betrothed, it was in Manon's heart so cruelly to distrust and upbraid her! Strange, indeed, that Manon, in every impulse and purpose of her soul always so kind and charitable, and in all manner filled with the attributes of loving sweetness, should now be so unjust! As Loys gazed down upon her, he saw how much brighter grew her eye and how much more radiant her expression with the animating picturing of her more enduring love! How like a glorified recollection of happier days the sweet manifold beauty of the olden affection illumined at this last hour her whole transfigured face! How utterly it seemed to banish thence every impress of her late severely feigned assumption of coldness and reserve! To speak thus critically about Cecile,—was it not full proof of jealous feeling? And is not all jealousy the fruit and symbol of true love? At that one instant of perception of the truth, his eyes seemed opened as by flash of inspiration,

"Your heart was once made jealous of her, sweet Manon?" he cried; not knowing that he spoke above the tone of their late whispering, yet so careless in his utterance that his voice in its intensity seemed almost to penetrate the arches overhead—not meaning to be overheard, yet forgetful all at once that any other than themselves stood by. "Nay, remain then still jealous of her, for so I like it best. You do not even now forget that once I was well-loved knight of yours? Then be so still and ever still the same; oh tenderly—more tenderly than ever heretofore,—beloved and only idol of my soul!"

CHAPTER XX.

WITH the new impulse of that great controlling joy, and no longer doubting that the affection that had once been his had never ceased and now again was openly and confessedly still all the same his own, Loys de Martelle flung his loving arm around her and drew her unresisting form close against his breast. At which Pere Rouflet, who all the while had remained uneasily watching over them, not altogether unapprehensive of such outbreak of newly-kindled love, felt it needful that he should interfere.

"Not that—not that!" he cried. "Sir Knight, think of the promise that you made me at her coming! Speak only your farewell and in better composure, and so let her depart,—not further leading her into unruly forgetfulness of her vows."

But even as he spoke there came new interruption upon the scene; for at that instant the Grand Duke's Jester, who also had been hovering near, not knowing how soon he too might be wanted, stepped forward and planted himself before Pere Rouflet, and with threatened force forbade his further interference.

"Touch them not, good Priest!" the Jester cried; in his sympathetic excitement shaking every little bell upon his tunic's hem. "It is you who have brought them together to say farewell,—it is you who must take the blame of what may further happen. Think you that they can part forever with as cold and deliberate courtesy as you dispense a two-fingered blessing, when leaving a room? Are they made of stone and steel, that they should go their several ways to death and to living tomb, with mere formal crossing of the palm? Nay, you shall not interfere, Priest, so long as I have strength to stand between and hinder. Speak on, Sir Knight, even as you will; seeing that I am your faithful guaranty that there shall be no foolish cold-minded interruption!"

The physical effort of the Jester for their protection prevailed; and Pere Rouflet half paralyzed remained irresolute nor offered further resistance. But the sympathetic words fell upon unregarding ears. Loys and Manon heard them not, for already their attention was attuned to no other sound than the sweet music of each other's voices. He sat with his wounded arm, now no longer conscious of single twinge of pain drawn lovingly about her, and she half reclining with her head resting upon his shoulder and the thick raven curls sweeping over his breast. The wrangle of Priest and Jester passed unheeded by them; as, with lips nearly touching, they whispered to each other the pleasant story of their never interrupted love. They saw not the lengthened shadows of

the great cathedral deepening into blackness, nor felt the rising chill of its cold gray pavement; imagination had already carried them upon its magic wings far away into other scenes. The little street court where Loys had first seen her, and even then had begun to love her,—the woodland path where meeting her again, not altogether by accident upon the part of either, he had told her his love,—the forest tree at whose foot she had been wont to tune her gittern and sing those songs which always sooner or later were interrupted by gentle caresses,—the rambles among the evening shades,—all these sweet and blissful memories of the past now came thronging around them in living realization; and so, for the moment and in that loving forgetfulness of the dreadful present, they were once more happy.

At last however,—yet not until many minutes,—there came, as there must come to every dream, the awakening. What brought it about,—whether new twinge of pain or distant sound creeping upon the notice of the ear,—little did the true cause matter, so long as it awoke them to a perception of the present. Now like the silent rolling away of fleecy summer clouds, the bright fancies of the serene past all vanished; and once more Loys and Manon felt the full realization of the dread array of circumstances surrounding them. The cold stone arches, the grinning corbels, the deepening shadows, the armed men faintly seen through the distant porch guarding their prey from flight,—no sound of

sympathy or word of cheer in all that terrible despair and gloom ;—these were the only objects that could now occupy their thoughts, the only sequence of their pleasant dream.

"A while ago," said Loys ; and in the fast weakening of his frame through hunger, pain and distress of mind he gazed upon Manon almost with supplicating look, as though pleading for her aid, "not many hours ago, it seemed as though I would gladly die, so little expectation of happiness had life left for me. But now——"

"Now, Loys?"

"I would still live ; for it seems as though life again had claims upon me. It is not too late that I should enjoy the coming years—could it only be that I might escape from here and be once more free. There is an old legend that the Church is charged with a curse upon the Martelles. So has it been indeed, for many generations past ; and yet there should come a time at last to every curse when its power must fail. Or, if the doom of this still lies upon me, surely I have already felt its power sufficiently that it should now be restrained from further action. Think, Manon, what may yet be before us, if I can hence escape ! No other ties now bind me ; nor are you yet fettered with more than the mere intent towards other duties. Henceforth surely we should live only for each other. I am truly wearied with the follies of the Court. Let me only become free again ; and in some other land I will turn student, artist, artizan or

what you will, so that I may remain at your side until death."

Again that look of entreaty; as though, in this sore strait, when mere manhood had proved so insufficient, her woman's wit might suggest relief. And for the moment, her heart aglow with his loving words, it really seemed to her as though she might have the power. Loys' friends had all now left him,—no knight or esquire would come forward for his rescue. But had she not friends of her own whom she could control for that good purpose? Lo! in the poorer quarter of the town she knew where dwelt a band of fifty students who had often told her that they would not hesitate to die for her, if needful. Could not these be mustered for Loys rescue? It was the hopeful suggestion of a single moment, only. The next instant her heart sank within her as she felt the bitterness of returning despair. For she remembered how, that very afternoon, when earliest she had learned about Loys peril, though not as yet knowing whither he had found refuge, she had chanced to linger where she had overheard the conversation of the students; and she had heard the misadventure of Loys so fiercely canvassed, such withering scorn expressed, such ignominy heaped upon his name, his fair fame which once had been a study and example for noble deeds now so wildly hissed and hooted, and only mentioned with a sneer or curse, that she had turned in utter affright and sought the solitude of her own home, as the only place where the re-

vilings against her love might not dare to penetrate. Little hope that in the studied misconstruction of Loys fateful act even she could turn these men to a better mind, and lead them to labor in Loys defence.

Yet would she not tell him this. Though he must learn how hopeless was all dependence upon herself, she could not let him know the reason why. And was there not another reason which she need not hesitate to mention, and which surely was all sufficient ?

"Alas ! Loys," she said, "why tempt me with happy dreams that never can be realized ? Look only upon me and learn the truth."

As once before to Pere Rouflet, so now to Loys she bared her wasted arm and drew his gaze upon it and bade him look into her face and mark there, also, the cruel wasting of disease. He had not noted this, before. The brightness of the eye and the sweet smile of the curved lip were there, and until now he had noted nothing else. But now at her bidding he dwelt upon the thin hands and the sunken cheek ; and reading there her doom, he groaned aloud.

"Do you not see and understand, dear Loys ? And seeing, you will not reproach me for saying nay to your appeal ? Remember only why I left you, and think how wrong for myself and you it would be for me to return. A few more weeks or even days, perhaps, and there will be no more a Manon. Already my poor strength grows daily weaker, and soon will altogether pass from me.

Will you then grudge me, Loys, these few remaining days for repentance and assurance of my peace of mind?"

"Ah, Manon; if it be so, indeed, how could I——"

"A little longer, Loys, and all will surely be done. But if you would wish for comfort—for the very little I can hope to give—let it consist in this. No convent walls can ever shut out thoughts of you or prayers for your life's welfare. That is no sin, indeed; and if it were, I cannot give it up, and the sin must abide with me all the same to the very end. Dying, I shall bless you, Loys; and it may be that should you escape from hence, some kind sister of the convent will afterwards, in memory of my request, seek for you and tell you that your name was last upon my lips."

"Nay Manon, if it must be so, then will I not tarry for that," he said; and with sudden resolution he rose upon his feet. "I said that a while ago I feared not death, and only now desired for life by reason of the newer happiness that my errant fancy seemed to open out before me. What care I still for life, since once again all that can make it dear is vanishing from my grasp? Or why should not the Church's curse upon my name now once more, as so often hitherto, be fulfilled unto the death? Let me not live to hear that you are gone, my Manon. I can well believe and trust that you will remember me to the end. Rather do I now intend that you shall know that when my last day came, I was not

unknightly or recreant in meeting the doom that fate has marked out for me."

"What mean you, Loys?"

For only answer, he staggered across the church to where the tomb of the old crusading Knight Conrad de Martelle gleamed white against the darker stone of wall and pillar. Then reaching up, Loys grasped the votive sword which hung over the tomb and lifted it off from the rings which held it in place. As has been said, it was a huge, two-handed sword, which, when placed upon the wearer's person, would reach almost from shoulder to heel.

"It will do at least to die with,—as a man should die," Loys murmured, with difficulty drawing the rusted blade from its scabbard and passing his finger along the hacked and time dulled edge,—and a pleasant smile as of some inner long delayed comfort and resolution stole upon his face. Then slowly carrying the heavy sword upon his shoulder, he crossed the church again and once more stood before Manon.

"What is it that I mean, Manon?" he said. "Nay, take my meaning not to heart, lest you might even now weaken my own resolution. For surely you must see that there is no escape hence for me. Is it not better, therefore, that I should give up my poor life like a true born knight, rather than as a rat caught in a cage and starved to death?"

"Ah, Loys!" she sobbed, now dimly perceiving his meaning. "Try to forbear."

"I, too, say that you should forbear!" cried Pere Rouflet, again struggling to come forward, and with equally ready comprehension of the Knight's intent. "In the name of Holy Church, I charge——"

"And I also charge, and in the name of honorable knighthood, good Priest, that now you do not interfere!" the Jester exclaimed, again standing sturdily before Pere Rouflet and by main force resisting his advance. "So let it go on to the end! Do you not see that my good comrade there is carrying out the brave and gallant conduct that most abundantly can attend his taking off? Would you have it happen that he should not die a soldier's death, but be sped finally like a cur in cellar ambush?"

Overborne by the Jester's force and words, Pere Rouflet remained in compulsory inaction, scarce daring longer to protest. And as once before, Loys and Manon stood below; unheeding, in the conflict of their emotion, all else that transpired about them. The protest of Priest and the stern interference of Jester,—these equally now were lost to them.

"Nay, I must not forbear, my Manon," the Knight responded. "Do you not see that nothing else now remains? Only promise that you will remain here, in peace and quiet; and not, with unavailing entreaty or resistance, fetter the little manhood that still is left to me. And you will forgive the wrong I have done you?"

"There is nothing to forgive, dear Loys," she faintly whispered.

"There is much,—much indeed," he said. "Yet let that pass. Pray to Heaven for me, that there also I may be forgiven. And now, one kiss for last farewell."

Sobbing, she put her arms about his neck, and let her head fall upon his shoulder; and her tears fell thick and fast, as the true consciousness of his intention dawned still more distinctly upon her. But yet, with a certain wild impulse of heroism she forbore to dissuade him from his purpose What else indeed was there for him to do? And was not his honor—now so deeply abased—dear also to herself? If by one action, he could help redeem his wounded fame, should she now dare restrain him?

At last he lifted her head from his shoulder, pressed a parting kiss upon her lips and tottered to his feet. Leaving her fainting form upon the steps, he slowly crept toward the open door, the great two-handed sword naked in his grasp. Behind him, at a few paces distance, the Jester followed, curious to mark the issue. So the two men advanced; and at length the Knight stood near the entrance and looked forth.

The moon was behind a cloud, and all was dark except where a few of the larger stars gave forth an uncertain light. Opposite the cathedral the houses clustered together in black indistinguishable mass, unless where here and there the shop lights sent a feeble gleam across the street. Few passers by could now be seen; only, at stated distances, the relentless men-at-arms, who, with

naked swords in hand, silently watched the cathedral door, so that no one should escape unquestioned.

For a moment the doomed man stood just within the entrance and gazed forth. For that moment, perhaps, his soul shrank within him as he saw that he was recognized by his enemies, and that at once every blade was pointed towards him, in fierce readiness to drink his blood. Then, with a single glance behind and his lips moving with soft muttering of a last prayer, he stepped forth from the protecting porch, and the work began. A short-lived work, indeed; for what could any man, weak and worn with wounds and hunger, do against those numbers who were so strong and active? So, though as he bared his breast to meet the onset, he struck down the first who advanced upon him, it was, after all, but a feeble resistance that he could make;—fighting with that heavy, unwieldy weapon, inspired by no hope of victory, and with the single desire that through manly ending he might atone for the foul blight upon his name.

"And it was well and bravely done, indeed," muttered the Jester to himself; as, after gazing for a moment from the doorway upon the lifeless bleeding body that lay in the street, with that dark crowd of avengers pressing closely around it, he strolled leisurely inward and up the broad nave to where, at the choir-steps, Pere Rouflet knelt, supporting Manon's senseless form.

THE END.

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